RESOURCES FOR EQUITABLE RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS: WHAT TO CONSIDER IN PROPOSING AND CONDUCTING RESEARCH

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIONS

There are many important considerations for collaborations. Collaborations involve teams of different personalities, often approaching the project from different disciplines and backgrounds. Misunderstandings and disagreements could disrupt the collaborative process. Successful collaborations often share key characteristics that help ensure members of the team are working well together. These include:

- Commitment to stated shared research goals and values for the project and collaboration.
- Respectful and equitable environment in which each voice, intellectual input, and direction of the project, or specific components of the project is valued.
- Trust, physical and psychological safety, and mutual respect must be present among all members of the collaboration.
- Openness and transparency about team member and the project's progress, challenges that may occur, financial issues, etc.
- Agreed upon processes for professional communication in person, via email, and in virtual environments.
- For interdisciplinary teams – clarity about disciplinary frameworks and terminology, clear and precise interactions, particularly for multinational teams—mapping out how all are accommodated

All members should take responsibility for individual work and feel ownership for the success of the overall project such that the project contributes to intellectual and career growth for all.

CONSIDERATIONS THROUGHOUT THE COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

Pre-Proposal/Proposal

- Address mutual expectations through open discussion, keep a written record (e.g., meeting agendas and notes).
    - For jointly developed parts of the proposal that emerge from team discussion, assign a notetaker.
- Clearly divide and establish who is responsible for various parts of the proposal and ensure that these roles are assigned in an equitable way.
- Align budget with roles, tasks and expectations.

UMassAmherst | ADVANCE Program

Faculty Collaboration & Equity

- Communicate frequently about progress, concerns, and questions, and periodically about what is going well and what needs to be strengthened.
- Establish Authorship and Credit Processes.
    - Have a conversation about the following questions and how decisions will be made once papers develop on: Where will the results be presented and/or published? Who will be included as authors? What will be the order of co-authors? Who will have the final authority to approve presentations or publications?
- Access to and Use of Data.
    - What type of access will members of the collaboration have to each other's original data and/or notes? How might members take commonly acquired data in different directions (goes back to authorship and credit)
- Intellectual Property.
    - Data Management Plan during and after project end.
    - Who has the rights to patentable inventions discovered in the performance of the research? (Individual authors, jointly owned by the collaborating institutions?)
- Conflict Resolution.
    - Identify a conflict resolution strategy.
    - Revisit the agreed upon working approach, norms, and timeline as a tool to frame and resolved conflict.
    - If conflicts should arise that can't be resolved internally, ask an outsider to facilitate resolution.
- Succession plan

RESOURCES FOR EQUITABLE RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS: WHAT TO CONSIDER IN PROPOSING AND CONDUCTING RESEARCH

- How are departures of original team members and addition of new team members handled?

Funded Project Start-Up

- Revisit scope of work and budget; make revisions as needed and/or determined by budget changes.
- Define roles and responsibilities for phases of project and tasks including project administration and outline plan for monitoring those activities.
- Outline plan for internal and external communication (e.g., funding agency). Revisit communication plan—how often, by what means and who.
- Develop decision tree—who makes day to day operational decisions, who weighs in on significant changes to scope of work, budget oversight and budget allocation, grant-funded personnel, pivots in response to ongoing data acquisition.
- Expand role of Advisory Board to evaluate collaborative activities (e.g., through regular interviews with team members or open-ended questionnaires).

During Project

- Revisit expectations, roles and responsibilities, and revise as needed.
- Revisit proposed project timeline and deliverables and revise as needed.
  - Use milestone tracking to determine progress and identify potential problems.
- Revisit authorship and credit, if needed.
- Discuss research accountability.
  - How frequently will the members of the collaboration meet to discuss and evaluate their results?
- Discuss data retention after end of project. (This should be spelled out in a data management plan at the proposal stage.)
- Conversation about next grant.

Closure

- Complete project tasks.
- Prepare final reports.
- Disseminate final reports.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDINGS (MOUS)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) sets the stage for a collaborative research project. An MOU is not a contract, but rather a formalized agreement that serves as the foundation for research relationships. Collaborators have to be willing to enact or practice the behaviors and attitudes represented in the MOU. A good MOU:

- Defines the purpose and structure of research partnership.
- Identifies project members.
- Clearly articulates roles and responsibilities.
- Describes project activities, timelines, and responsibilities.
- Describes products and associated responsibilities.
- Describes intellectual property and resource allocation.
- Codifies commitments proactively.
- Establishes a mechanism to resolve challenges.

In addition to MOU's other resources can be used to ensure the success of a collaboration. These resources include:

- Conflict Management Plan*
- Data Management Plan (requirement of federal programs)
- Intellectual Property Agreements, Non-Disclosure Agreements*
- Material Transfer Agreements *
- Data Use Agreements*
- Facility Use Agreements*
- Award related forms/policies
- Drug-Free Workplace Policy Agreement
- Participation Agreement (PAG)
- Pre-establishment of Account Agreement
- Subcontract Approval and Sole Source Justification
- CRediT Taxonomy
- Authorship Agreement
- Team Contract*
- Collaborative Agreement
- Title IX Best Practices and Guidance*

*These tend to be institution specific. Places to look include – Ombuds Office, Office of Sponsored Research, Tech Transfer or Intellectual Property Offices, IT Security, and Title IX Office or Equal Opportunity and Diversity Office.