Tools   ADVANCE-Institutional Transformation

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Continuing Research Collaboration Relationships

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# CONTINUING EQUITABLE RESEARCH COLLABORATION RELATIONSHIPS

*This tool–**Continuing** equitable research collaboration relationships–is part 2 of a three tool series for embedding equity into all phases of research collaboration. See also **Creating** equitable research collaborations (part 1) and **Crediting** collaboration equitably (part 3).*

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Faculty Collaboration & Equity

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES TO CONTINUING EQUITABLE RESEARCH COLLABORATION RELATIONSHIPS?

New relationship energy, including in research collaboration relationships, can help to develop social bonds; but good relationships require a commitment to maintaining the tie. Many research collaborations begin with good intentions but fall apart when tensions arise. Having a plan for caring for the research collaboration relationship— including mending and repairs—can make a difference between a good and bad collaboration.

Good communication and trust characterize the most successful research teams. Teams that have developed and practice strategies for working together equitably are more effective. Meeting regularly helps to build trust. In interviews, faculty from marginalized groups report the critical importance of being able to trust that collaborators who are members of majority groups and/or senior to them will treat them with respect.

Equity in resources and support for collaboration matters throughout the life of a research project. Faculty needs may differ; equity in collaborative resources is not necessarily the same as equality. The figure below from the 2022 UMass ADVANCE survey data imply that campus support through internal grants and seed funding may also support women faculty's feelings of inclusion.

Figure 3: Factors Facilitating Research Collaboration

Notes: *p<0.10. **p<0.05. ***p<0.01
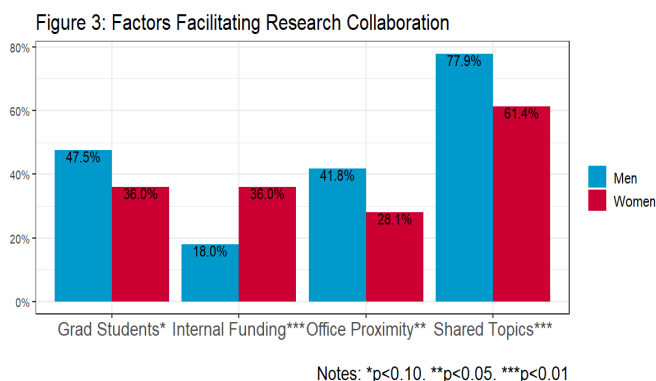
Time is a critical resource necessary to maintaining collaborations. Faculty members need opportunities to interact, informally as well as formally, to continue to develop ideas, and work well together. Processes for repairing relationships when tensions or conflicts arise often involves time to sit down together both for one-on-ones and for larger team meetings. Allow for timeline adjustments, recognizing that work and life commitments may require team flexibility, especially in long-term projects.

Inclusion matters in collaborators treating each other's insights with respect, identifying the contributions diverse collaborators can make, and in budgetary equity that continues when adjustments need to be made during a collaboration. Community partners or faculty from different institutions may have different budgetary needs or requirements.

HOW CAN FACULTY MEMBERS MAINTAIN FAIR AND EQUITABLE COLLABORATIONS?

All faculty experience challenges in research collaboration, including issues of time, logistics, and interpersonal dynamics. Women are more likely than men to recount interpersonal challenges while engaging in collaboration. Foreign-born women voice concern that their intellectual contributions are not always heard. Black women often experience a lack of respect, including having their competence questioned. The lack of respect can have material consequences, such as when a project moves in the wrong direction or takes longer to complete. Efforts to continue good collaborations benefit all faculty and may especially help women faculty of color feel their collaborations are productive.

Some collaborators develop Memorandums of Understanding, written documents laying out expectations for contributions to writing proposals or papers, carrying out research, access to instruments, and other details. These MOUs must be living documents and adjust as the relationship changes over time.

CONTINUING EQUITABLE RESEARCH COLLABORATION RELATIONSHIPS

Regular team meetings can be a place where equity is put into practice. Some ways that team meetings can be more equitable include:

1. Rotate who leads team meetings - giving voice to different people regularly.

2. Continue to discuss authorship of papers and be transparent about workloads on other projects at regular meetings. Keep updating your Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and other formal safeguards to serve as the foundation for research relationships, including articulating roles, responsibilities, and authorship agreements.

3. Keep a shared document in the cloud open, viewed by all, for meeting minutes to record who says what in real time. This practice can help provide reminders of tasks and to credit everyone for their ideas.

4. Faculty from minoritized groups might consider locating an ally on the team who will speak up on their behalf if they are being silenced. Priming allies in private, before the meetings.

WHAT SHOULD FACULTY MEMBERS DO TO SUSTAIN GOOD COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS?

Collaborations can increase opportunities and productivity, but they require care and feeding to remain good relationships. Qualities of equitable collaboration that need sustaining include:

- Commitment to stated **shared research goals and values** for the project and collaboration
- Respectful and equitable environment in which **each person's voice**, intellectual input, and direction of the project, or specific components of the project **is valued**
- Trust, physical and psychological **safety, and mutual respect** among all members
- Openness and **transparency** about team member participation 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
- Clarity about **disciplinary frameworks and terminology**
- Clear and precise **plans for communication and interaction**

Case studies can often be helpful for engaging in the challenging conversations that need to be a regular part of checking in for a healthy team. See the case study below as one entry point for these conversations.

Case Study: Collaboration Communication Challenges

Mayumi has been collaborating with her team for almost a year, but she has concerns that her intellectual contributions are not always heard. She finds it hard to interject into the team conversations when everybody is talking loudly over each other. She does not want to interrupt, but she also wants her voice to be heard. Last month, she proposed an idea but her colleagues just shrugged. When someone more senior proposed the same idea more recently, everyone thought it was a direction worth pursuing. She suspects her gender, race, and nationality as a foreign-born Asian woman contribute to her being silenced.

How would you deal with this collaboration challenge if you were Mayumi? If you were Mayumi's team member and peer mentor?

Also see other relevant UMass ADVANCE tools: [Resources for Equitable Research Collaborations](#), and [Equitable Research Collaboration Between Faculty and Grad Students](#).