



Collaborative partnerships in research

Ellen McIntyreⁱ, Eleanor Jackson-Bowers, Libby Kalucy, Barbara Beacham

Updated: Melissa Ravenⁱⁱ

Collaborative partnerships between researchers, practitioners, decision makers, consumers and community members can strengthen research. They can enhance the relevance of research questions, ensure that the research methods are appropriate and feasible, and improve the chances of research funding. These partnerships can also aid the translation of research results into practice and policy, as well as contribute to faster development of the body of research and a research culture.

Collaborations occur to enable sharing of different perspectives, skills, resources and other attributes that contribute to effectively addressing the research problem.

Benefits

- Improve quality, relevance and usefulness of research
- develop valuable insights based on others' perspectives
- expand existing views and roles
- enhance research capacity
- improve chances of research funding
- contribute to positive changes in practice, policy and/or the community
- build a research and evaluation culture within practice, policy and the community
- provide wider networks for dissemination.

Values and principles guiding partnerships

Key values that form the basis for effective collaborative partnerships in research include:

- trust and respect
- commitment to the collaboration
- realistic expectations of each partner
- clarity of purpose and roles
- mutually agreed goals
- tangible benefits for each partner
- flexibility
- recognition of diversity
- reflection and evaluation.

Costs and challenges

- Increased time needed for development and planning
- need for greater flexibility
- acceptance of differences and diversity
- increased financial investment
- increased resources
- increased potential for conflict
- commitment to the collaboration
- communication amongst the partners.

Strategies for success and effectiveness

- Ensure there is sufficient commonality of purpose or interest
- identify and provide strategic opportunities for involvement
- offer opportunities for capacity development to support involvement
- attend to the collaborative processes as well as the research processes
- invest time and resources in the collaboration
- ensure the approach is compatible with the subject, topic, skills and styles of the partners
- ensure all partners have ownership of the collaboration
- agree on a dissemination plan
- identify and respond early to potential obstacles to the collaboration.

ⁱ Director, PHCRIS

ⁱⁱ Research Fellow, PHCRIS



Funding for Collaborative Research

- NHMRC Partnership Projects <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/grants/apply-funding/partnerships-better-health/partnerships-projects>
- ARC Linkage Projects http://www.arc.gov.au/ncgp/lp/lp_default.htm

Phases of collaborative research partnerships

Phases	Key questions to consider
Planning	What are the goals of the collaboration?
	What goals are of interest to all partners?
	Who else is needed or should be involved?
	Where (in what organisation and with what key players) are the goals most likely to be achieved?
	What access to these key players is required?
Assessment	Who are the key players in the system and what are their goals, roles, skills and needs?
	Who should be contacted and by whom?
	Who else needs to support this goal if it is to be enacted?
	What are the roles of each organisation?
	How do the planned goals fit with the roles of others in this context?
	What can be offered to all partners?
	What is the best strategy for entering the context?
	What is the feasibility of these goals being achieved?
Formulation	What are the terms of agreement? (e.g. What? From whom? In exchange for what? Provided by whom? When? With whose permission?)
	What is the structure of the collaboration, including reporting relationships?
Implementation	What structure will enlist the commitment, competence, consistency of constituents, competitors and members of various organisations? Terms of reference? Membership?
	What are the strengths or weaknesses in the system that will support or prevent the continued change?
	What risks will need to be managed, and by whom?
Evaluation	What continuing activities, contacts, communications are necessary to allow development of the innovation or prevent sabotage?
	What are the indicators that the system is accommodating to the new goals?

Resources

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To contact PHCRIS:

w phcris.org.au **e** phcris@flinders.edu.au
PHCRIS Assist: 1800 025 882

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