

Equitable Collaboration and Partnership

Equitability between partners is the foundation for any successful collaboration but can be particularly hard to build and maintain when there is a power imbalance. This checklist is intended to support staff to consider equitability in building effective and sustainable collaborations, and is based around five headings:

1. Aims

A shared vision can be created by aligning individual goals, ensuring plans include diverse priorities, interests and perspectives. All critical expertise is represented, and common ground is established through early discussions that value each partner's unique contributions. Our aim is to foster an environment where all collaborators feel ownership and commitment to the overarching objectives.

2. Partners and Stakeholders

The value of each participant's input is recognised and fully leveraged, and roles and responsibilities are clear. All partners are enabled to contribute, and awareness and removal of barriers maximises inclusivity of all perspectives.

3. Governance

Decision-making structures are transparent, participatory, and reflective of the diverse interests within the collaboration, and the times and methods used for meetings work for all participants. Moreover, governance frameworks should actively address historical power imbalances, creating opportunities for all parties to influence the direction and priorities of the collaboration.

4. Tools and Methods

Equitable tools and methods promote fair participation, ensuring that no participant is disadvantaged due to resource constraints or technological barriers. We endeavour to understand and address barriers to use of technology, data-sharing platforms, and communication channels to empower all partners to contribute meaningfully.

5. Outputs

Equitable collaborations prioritise distributing benefits and outcomes based on everyone's contributions. Resources should be allocated fairly, recognising diverse roles, and monitoring and evaluation processes should be transparent to ensure partners can assess their impact hold themselves accountable for equitable outcomes.

The checklist draws on previous work in the University such as the Principles of Engagement of [Cambridge-Africa](#) and [Cambridge Global Challenges](#), and external sources such as the [UK Collaboration for Development Research which offers a wide range of more in depth resources](#).

Checklist for equitability in collaborations and partnerships

1. Aims

- a. Is the goal well-articulated?
 - i. A well-articulated goal or set of goals is key for the success of any project and is the starting point for consideration of equitability.
- b. Have all partners participated appropriately in formulating the aims?
 - i. Diverse perspectives help you make the most of opportunities and avoid blind spots and mistakes. However, to benefit from this advantage, all partners must be empowered to participate fully in the articulation of goals and the project design.
 - ii. Before a final project plan is reached, discuss it with your proposed partners, starting with articulating the main question or aim together, and then how to get there. This approach decreases the risk of a partner agreeing to deliver something that is not aligned with their own strategic goals, which can lead to lack of progress and potential conflict.
 - iii. A “pre-mortem” involves a candid discussion about things that may go wrong; If this project has failed in X years’ time, why would that be? What are you most worried about? This can be used to articulate risks and develop the project plans.
- c. Are all relevant stakeholders represented?
 - i. What expertise, participation and buy in are necessary to achieve your aims? This may change during the lifetime of a project, but it is good to have an idea from the beginning and a plan on when and how to involve the right people. It is especially important to consider this if the work is focussed on, or using samples or data from, a particular group of people or geographical region. Is there region-specific expertise or interest groups whose input would be valuable or even indispensable? This could be partners from the communities most affected by, or with lived experience of, the topic of investigation.

2. Partners and Stakeholders

- a. Are the roles and responsibilities of each partner clear?
 - i. Many projects have an element of uncertainty, and it may not be possible to predict all outcomes at the beginning. However it is beneficial to consider and articulate what you can predict, the work that will be required to deliver it, and who is responsible for which components. This highlights dependencies, risks and bottlenecks within the programme of work, and the transparency enables all partners to see what they need from each other to progress.
- b. Are there barriers to participation?
 - i. Language: consider what languages your partners prefer, and if translation help is required for equitable input. Even if they are willing to use English with you, keep communication clear and accessible to return the favour.
 - ii. Culture: different styles of approach can be misunderstood or misinterpreted, and lead to a breakdown in communication, missed opportunities or unnoticed risks. Being aware of your own cultural preferences, asking questions and consulting people who are familiar with the cultural context can help you navigate.
 - iii. Disability: address physical and virtual barriers to participation and ask participants what they need.

3. Governance

- a. Is there clarity and agreement on how to manage the joint work?
 - i. Discuss how decisions will be made, and who will be involved. Ensure that all partners will be represented and heard and consider how chairing/lead responsibilities are allocated to benefit fully from diverse perspectives.
- b. Is there clarity and agreement on how to meet and discuss?
 - i. Discuss how often and for how long you will meet and whether to meet in person or online. When including partners from different time zones it is good to consider convenient times, regional holidays, connectivity issues, choice and cost of virtual platforms. When considering meeting in person, cost/risks in different venues and barriers to securing visas should be taken into account.
 - ii. There should also be clarity and agreement on who is in charge of scheduling, requesting agenda items and taking and sharing minutes and actions, and time lines for this so that all participants can allocate time appropriately.
- c. Is there clarity on funding and/or contributions in kind?
 - i. Is the funding in place for planned activities and required tools and technology, and have the partner organisations agreed to contribute the time of the required staff? What is already in place, and what would require additional grant application or fund raising?
- d. Is there clarity on intellectual property rights, ethics approvals and confidentiality agreements?
 - i. Consider relevant legislation and the expectations from your institutions regarding policy or guidelines. Further information should be sought from the [Research Operations Office](#)

4. Tools and Methods

- a. Is there clarity and agreement on which platforms and resources will be used for sharing data and working on shared documents?
 - i. A data management plan with details about software and platforms to use is very helpful, not least because specificity enables partners to consider whether a particular tool is available and accessible for them, or if there are unanticipated costs or other barriers to participation. Some things cannot be anticipated ahead of time, but it is good practice to describe the things that can, as transparency and predictability promote trust.

5. Outputs

- a. Is there clarity and agreement on what the outputs will be?
 - i. Clarity on the anticipated outputs, be they manuscripts, reports or other impacts, makes it possible to articulate what each partner will contribute and what they require to deliver.
- b. Is there clarity and agreement on how progress will be monitored and evaluated?
 - i. Consider from the start how you will know if you are on track with the joint work. A timeline with estimated dates for completion of work packages, continuously reviewed and modified to reflect progress, can help with this.
- c. Is there clarity and agreement on how authorship and ownership will be allocated and managed?
 - i. Transparency enables all partners to know what they are working towards and minimises the risks of conflicts. It is not always possible to predict all outputs from a programme of work, but a general approach or framework for how to allocate authorship on manuscripts can also be helpful in promoting transparency and trust so that everyone feels confident in contributing their best efforts.