

The EquiPar Tool

Supporting Equitable Partnerships for Research Projects

Introduction

Partnerships are the foundation of the research that we do at LSHTM. Building healthy and mutually beneficial partnerships intrinsically concerns equity. At the heart of equity lie the principles of fairness and the distribution of resources according to needs. Historical legacies of colonisation, power relations, imbalances in opportunity and resources, perceived hierarchies of knowledge, and cultural norms can all lead to inequitable partnerships. We want to consider how we can build research partnerships from the outset to facilitate understanding, fairness, awareness of each other's contexts, trust and mutual exchange of expertise and knowledge.

Several sets of guidelines have been developed to use within global health research partnerships. Three that are highly relevant to our context include: the [Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research \(CCGHR\) Partnership Assessment Toolkit](#); the [Research Fairness Initiative Reporting Guide \(RFI\)](#); and the [Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries' \(KFPE\) Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships](#). For crisis affected countries, please see LSHTM's Health in Humanitarian Crises Centre's [Charter](#) and [implementation guidance](#) for decolonising research, teaching and partnerships.

Principles of Research Partnerships

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decide on the objectives together - Build up mutual trust - Share information; develop networks - Share responsibility - Create transparency - Monitor & evaluate the collaboration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disseminate the results - Apply the results - Share profits equitably - Increase research capacity - Build on the achievements |
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[KFPE Guidelines for Research in Partnership with Developing Countries, 1998](#)

Drawing mainly on these three guidelines, as well as our collective experience, the EquiPar tool was developed to help us establish strong foundations and processes for our research partnerships. We encourage research teams and their partners to try using this tool in their current and developing research projects. The tool is just one step in the longer-term process of developing and maintaining partnerships, which also involves a range of "softer" considerations such as personal relationships, mutual trust and humility. However, we hope that research teams will find this tool helpful in thinking through their partnerships systematically, prompting action and change where necessary to promote effective and equitable collaboration.

How to use this tool

What? The EquiPar Tool is designed to provide practical and pragmatic guidance for establishing and strengthening equitable partnerships. This tool doesn't tell you what to do, rather it poses a series of

questions for you to reflect on with your team and develop your own strategies. The tool poses questions for research teams to consider on three key themes: people management and relationships, research activities and outputs, and contracting and resource management.

When? The tool can be used by researchers at multiple stages during the research cycle. It will be particularly useful at the start of partnerships to set expectations, and establish procedures. However, researchers are encouraged to revisit the tool at multiple stages during their collaboration, including at the end. The tool may also provide helpful guidance for responding to unforeseen opportunities or challenges that arise. See figure 1 for suggestions about when different sections of the tool might be more relevant, although of course, all issues can be important at all stages.

How? The expectation is that this range of questions can be considered in an open and consultative way with partners. Throughout the document, there are links to resources which can guide you through the process – and please feel free to suggest more! Researchers should assign time for the discussions, and plan follow-up meetings and activities where required, and budget for them if necessary. You may want to document the discussion, or record joint agreements, and share these with partners and other relevant stakeholders. You can return to this documentation multiple times within the project, to update it or to remind yourself of the agreements made. There is currently no expectation for you to submit your answers. **On page 10 we have added a few suggestions for using the tool drawing on some working examples.**

Who? We hope the guidelines will be relevant to all staff involved in research project partnerships. Some elements will be particularly important for PIs, but it is recommended that all staff are aware of the guidelines and feel confident to apply them in their work. You may want to share the guidelines with your research partners, and other relevant stakeholders.

If you have any suggestions for improvements to this tool, or additional resources to recommend, please contact Catherine Goodman (catherine.goodman@lshtm.ac.uk) or Ginny Bond (virginia.bond@lshtm.ac.uk)

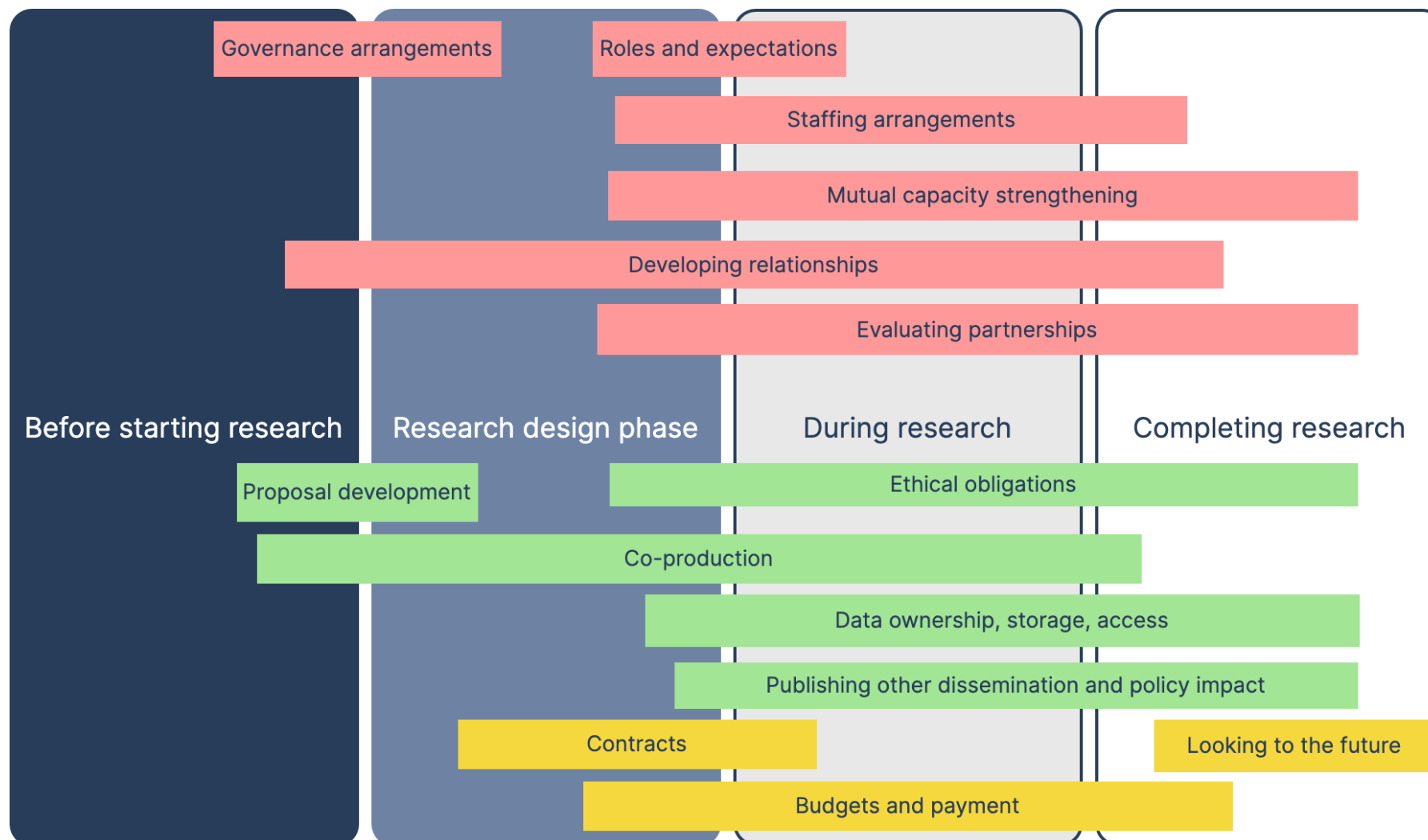


Figure 1: Moments when equitable partnerships issues will arise in the research cycle (red: people management and professional relationships, green: research activities and outputs, yellow: contracts and resource management).

Theme one: People management and professional relationships

What are our governance arrangements?

- Do they support equitable partnership?
- Have we considered opportunities for distributed leadership?
- How will we communicate? (e.g. regular check-in calls / emails / platforms such as MS teams)
- Are methods of communicating accessible and inclusive (e.g. for people with disabilities)?
- What principles or approaches will we follow to foster transparency in our partnership?
- How will we deal with any conflicts / concerns that may arise?
- Do partners know who to contact at LSHTM if they feel their concerns are not addressed properly within the project? (e.g. Head of Department, Dean of Faculty, Research Governance Lead)
- Are all partners given the opportunity to read and comment on these guidelines?

Have we jointly agreed on the roles and expectations of each partner?

- What expectations does each partner have?
- What roles would each partner like to take?
- Are these reflected in contract docs e.g. TOR or other collaborative agreements?

What is our plan for mutual capacity strengthening?

- What strengths do the partners already bring? What are their learning needs?
- Have we considered the opportunities for knowledge sharing and mutual learning within the project for research and administrative staff? How will we assess this?
- Can partners advise each other on suggested readings, networks, people to follow on twitter etc to help develop a deeper understanding of (i) the research context in study countries, and (ii) the broad topic under investigation?
- What opportunities are there for Early Career Researchers to participate in all stages of the project?
- Can we source funding for formal training – within the main grant or from other sources?
- Should we develop a formal capacity development plan?
- How will we monitor capacity development throughout the project?

What considerations have we made for equitable staffing arrangements?

- Does our project draw sufficiently on local expertise? Are local researchers hired where possible?
- Have LSHTM staff been appropriately trained and briefed on the local context / culture / political situation etc before visiting / engaging with partners?
- Have we considered equity in terms of gender, disability and other sources of diversity in staffing and project activities?
- Do all partners understand issues that might arise around local partner safety?

- Do all partners understand the demands arising on staff in different contexts, at the personal, institutional and national levels, particularly in times of crisis?

What activities will we use to develop our relationships?

- How will we help our team get to know each other, understand each other's institutions, and build relationships?
- What approaches could be planned to help the team develop relationships (e.g. social activities, exchanges, workshops etc)?

How will we evaluate how well our partnership is working?

- What opportunities will be built in for periodic reflection on our partnership? What form will this take e.g. survey tool, focus groups, informal discussions?
- How should people raise concerns?
- What if we can't resolve a conflict internally?

Resources: People management and professional relationships

Equitable roles

[The Funding Web \(We All Count\)](#) – a tool to help you unpack the interplay between money, data and decision making between partners.

Mutual Capacity Strengthening

[RECAP Capacity Strengthening Workplan](#)

[RESYST Consortium Capacity Development Strategy](#)

[RESYST Consortium Capacity Needs Assessment](#)

[CHEPSAA - How to do Capacity Assessments for Health Policy and Systems Research in University Settings: A Handbook](#)

[LSTM Centre for Capacity Research](#) – see useful publications and guidelines

[Vitae Professional Development for researchers](#) – useful resources for ECRs

Developing the relationships

[Rethinking Research Partnerships: Discussion Guide and Toolkit](#) – contains 21 Tools which are interactive visual workshop activities around specific themes, Christian Aid and OU 2017

Monitoring and evaluating a partnership

[CCGHR Partnership Assessment Toolkit questions to monitor a partnership \(Phase II page 19\)](#)

[The Equity Tool \(EQT\) for Valuing Global Health Partnerships, Larson et al 2022](#)

[GSDRC guide on monitoring and evaluating civil society partnerships](#)

[Intrac brief on M&E of partnerships](#)

[RESYST Consortium Satisfaction Survey](#)

Partnerships in humanitarian crisis contexts

[Elrha: Partnerships review – Research for health in humanitarian crises](#)

Theme two: Research activities and outputs

How can we maximise opportunities for all partners to contribute to proposal development?

- How will partners be involved in proposal design and writing? Are any resources available to support this (e.g. funds for visits)?
- How can we provide opportunities for all partners to be involved in key stages such as protocol and tool development?

What opportunities exist to introduce elements of co-production into the project?

- In addition to partners, who should we include to co-design the project? The study population, potential beneficiaries, policy makers, other stakeholders?

Moments for co-production might include:

- Before funding award: deciding on what to study / where to apply for funding / developing the proposal and budget
- After funding award: co-designing research tools, piloting tools with study populations, data validation / research feedback meetings with research participants.

How will we manage ethical obligations during this partnership?

- Which ethical principles / processes will be followed (particularly if we are collaborating across disciplines or with non-research partners)?
- Which ethical and other approvals should be obtained in all partner countries and in which order? Who is responsible for these?

Do we have an equitable plan for publishing, other dissemination and policy impact?

- What are the principles of dissemination? Will the study population receive the findings first? National bodies next? International bodies last?
- How will we decide which outputs to produce and who does what?
- Have we agreed on a set of authorship principles?
- Have we agreed on a set of principles for other dissemination e.g. internet, press, social media, conferences?
- What are the institutional structures in place to disseminate findings to different audiences?
- Are outputs accessible to people with different types of disabilities?

How can we ensure equitable ownership, storage, access and use of data and samples?

- Who will own data and any samples, and what arrangements will be made for other partners to use this? Are Data Transfer Agreements required? (standard practice should be data owned by the institution in the country in which the data are collected, with a licence for use / right of use granted to other partners as appropriate)

- Similarly for samples. Are Material Transfer Agreements required?
- Are there other ownership issues e.g. IPR?

Resources: Research activities and outputs

Publication and other outputs

[E-pharmacy template for Publication Guidelines and Plan](#)

[AMFm Dissemination Principles](#)

Co-production Resources

[NIHR Guidance on co-producing a research project \(April 2021\)](#)

[NIHR Reflective questions to support co-produced research \(May 2020\)](#)

Lokot & Wake, [The co-production of research between academics, NGOs and communities in humanitarian response: a practice guide](#). LSHTM 2021

[BMJ Special Issue on co-production, 2021](#)

Theme three: Contracting and resource management

Budget and payment

- Is the budget allocation fair?
- Does any partner feel they have inadequate resources for what they've been asked to do, both financially, and in terms of other resources they need to draw on?
- Does the budget cover key aspects of equitable partnership such as co-production, capacity strengthening, writing up time and publication costs? Are accessibility requirements accounted for?
- Have overheads or indirect costs been included fairly for each institution, to cover institutional resources (e.g. buildings, equipment, utilities or staff) that the project may draw upon?
- Has an appropriate payment schedule been drawn up? Will partners receive advances where this is necessary?

Contractual arrangements

- What type of agreement will you use to formalise the partnership (e.g. MoU, MoA, research contract)
- Do all parties have reasonable expectations of how long the contractual process will take and what challenges may arise if there are delays? If contracts are delayed, is there a shared understanding of what preparatory work could be done in advance of a signed contract, and what funds will support that?
- Is there mutual understanding of processes for due diligence, and monitoring of contract performance? Is there any need for additional support with these processes?
- Does each partner know who they need to communicate with about contracting and finance in each institution, and who is responsible for regulatory issues e.g. ethics?
- Which country's law will govern the contract, and are all parties comfortable with this plan?

Looking to the future

- Have we agreed on a research completion plan that articulates how resources are to be allocated, staff redeployed or transitioned, and ownership of biological and intellectual property managed at the end of the project?
- Have we planned for project meetings and consultations to explore future directions, new relationship opportunities, transition possibilities etc?
- What can we do to improve the sustainability of this project, and equitable partnerships fostered?

Resources: Contracting and resource management

Where there is no lawyer: Guidance for fairer contract negotiation in collaborative research partnerships, and associated Guidance notes COHRED 2013

Ideas about how to implement the tool

Using the tool during proposal development

- You can apply the tool during the proposal development process by reflecting on the three main areas in the tool at that early stage. For example, thinking about governance issues together, thinking about people management and professional relationships and considering opportunities for distributed leadership.
- During the proposal development, you could include EquiPar as part of the project design, detailing for the funder how you intend to use it.

Using the tool during the research process

- This could be through ongoing self-reflections about equitable partnership principles and practices, within the project team, supported by facilitated discussions.
- It could be a regular exercise that you incorporate into project workshops and meetings, or if time permits, schedule a focused event or activity to discuss equity issues using the tool.
- Identify an EquiPar champion within the project team who would raise awareness, and facilitate and track use of the tool within the research team.
- Every research project and partnership may have different needs and priorities that need addressing. Different strategies could be used to identify project/partnership specific needs such as a staff survey, or an action points template used in project leadership meetings. Another approach could be to use the Traffic Light Tool below to identify, prioritise and respond to project needs. This tool could be used in discussions or a survey.

Traffic Light Tool to assess equitable partnership needs in projects

	A	B	C	D
	Theme	Criterion	Time of review (mm of project)	How are we faring (score out of 3, with 3 being best performance)
1				
2	People management & professional relationships	Governance arrangements		3
3	People management & professional relationships	Roles and expectations		3
4	People management & professional relationships	Staffing arrangements		2
5	People management & professional relationships	Mutual capacity strengthening		1
6	People management & professional relationships	Developing relationships		1
7	People management & professional relationships	Evaluating partnerships		2
8	Research activities and outputs	Proposal development		2
9	Research activities and outputs	Ethical obligations		1
10	Research activities and outputs	Co-production		3
11	Research activities and outputs	Data ownership, storage and access		3
12	Research activities and outputs	Publishing, dissemination and policy impact		3
13	Contracting and resource management	Budget and payment		3
14	Contracting and resource management	Contractual arrangements		3