

Building Collaborative Proposals



**Online Grant Writing Workshop for Early and Middle
Career Researchers**

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Parasitic and parachute research

- Rise in scale and scope of collaborative global health research.
- Explained by structural and scientific factors
 - Addressing global health disparities
 - Major funding initiatives (Gates Foundation, Wellcome)
 - New scientific developments and techniques (genomics)
 - Large data sets available
 - Collaboration not isolation
- Research does not exist in a vacuum -> Involves complex historical, political and economic partnerships between researchers.
- Clinicians and educators must understand health, healthcare and health research as situated in social, political and historical contexts and respond to how these contexts created and sustain health inequities.



Is it fair? Quantity versus quality

Measuring the growth of collaborations provides little insight into their qualities, or whether they are equal or fair.

Research collaborations reproduce relationships and conditions which disproportionately favour high-income countries and institutions. *Do you agree?*

Publication authorship, the named principal investigators and grant holders for funding applications, staff remuneration policies, tax exemption for foreign researchers and the ownership of samples and data have all been presented as areas where current inequalities undermine equal partnerships and collaborations.

Why Collaboration matters

Understanding the benefits of teamwork



1. Enhances scientific quality and innovation

- **Combines diverse expertise:** Complex research problems often span multiple disciplines. Collaboration brings together specialists (e.g., clinicians, statisticians, social scientists, data analysts) to produce more rigorous and innovative work.
- **Stimulates creativity:** Interacting with researchers from different backgrounds challenges assumptions and introduces new perspectives that can lead to novel hypotheses and methods.

2. Strengthens research credibility and impact

- **Improves methodological robustness:** Cross-checking ideas and data among collaborators enhances scientific rigor and reproducibility.
- **Expands dissemination and influence:** Collaborative publications often reach broader audiences and have higher citation impact due to wider networks.

3. Increases efficiency and productivity (greater funding potential)

- **Shared resources and infrastructure:** Collaborative teams can pool laboratory facilities, datasets, biobanks, and technology platforms, reducing duplication and costs.
- **Accelerates timelines:** Work can be divided efficiently across teams or sites, allowing simultaneous progress on different components of a project.

Factors important to successful research collaborations?

- *Active involvement in cutting-edge, interesting science*
- *Effective Leadership*
- *Competence in and commitment to good scientific practice*
- *Capacity building*
- *Respect for the needs, interests and agendas of all partners*
- *Opportunities for discussion and disagreement*
- *Trust and confidence*
- *Justice and fairness in collaboration*

Why Collaboration matters

Understanding the benefits of teamwork

4. Builds capacity and equity

- **Supports training and mentorship:** Partnerships allow junior researchers to learn from experienced teams and gain access to advanced methods and facilities.
- **Promotes equitable global research:** Collaboration between high-income and low- and middle-income countries (HICs and LMICs) helps share knowledge, strengthen local capacity, and ensure that research benefits are globally distributed.

5. Facilitates complex, large-scale studies

- **Essential for multi-site trials and big data projects:** Many modern studies (e.g., genomics, pandemic response, climate-health research) require participant numbers and data diversity that no single institution can achieve alone.

6. Aligns with ethical and societal responsibilities

- **Ensures relevance:** Collaborative engagement with communities, policymakers, and health systems ensures that research addresses real-world needs.
- **Builds trust:** Transparent partnerships enhance accountability and promote fair recognition of all contributors.

Finding Collaborators

Identifying Co-Investigators for Success

1. Map expertise

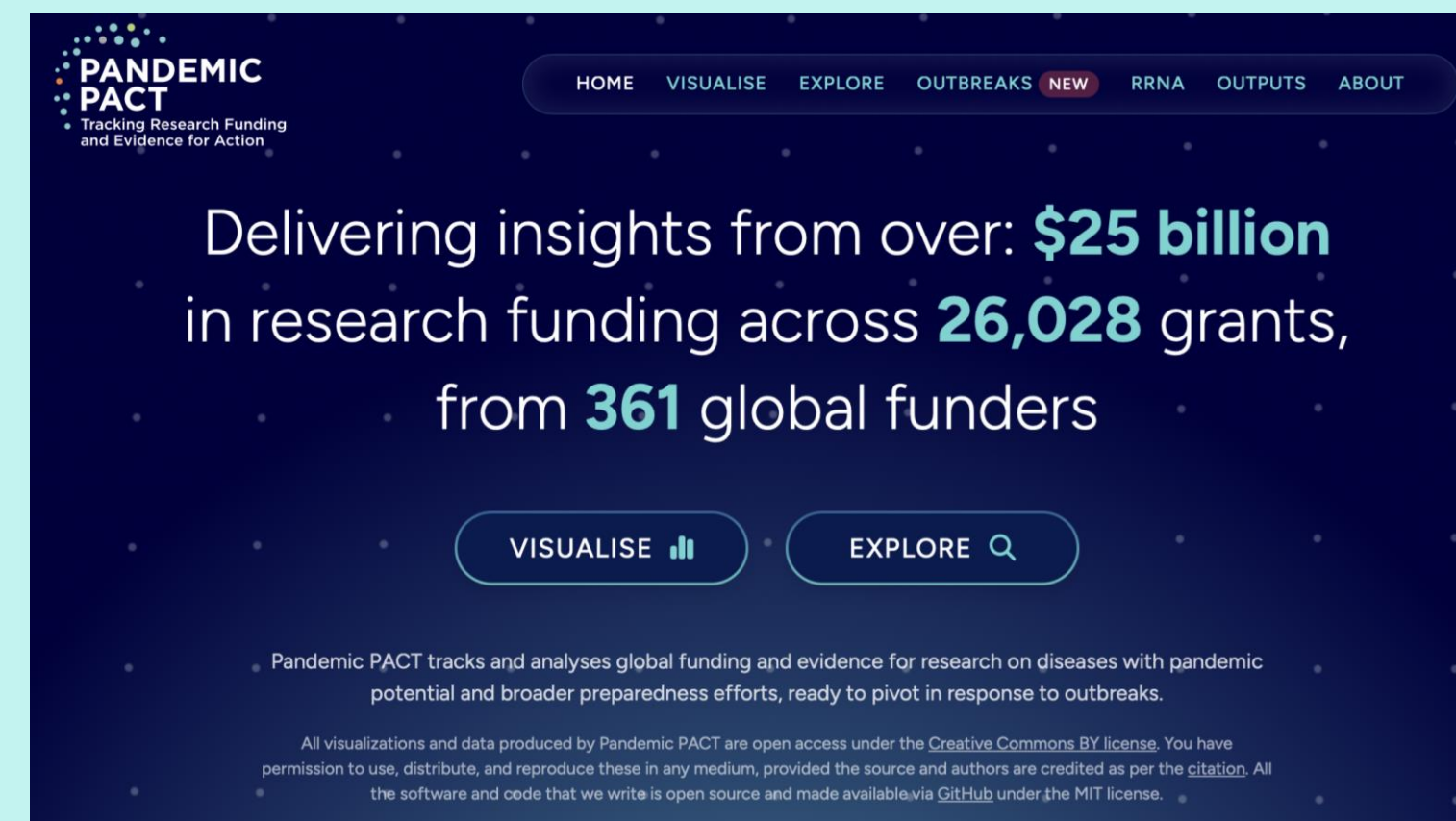
- Outline expertise required in your project
- Identify potential collaborators who possess the necessary skills and knowledge

2. Use Networks

- Attend conference, workshops etc. and utilize professional networks to meet potential collaborators.
- Engage with peers

3. Search Resources

- Explore literature and data bases to find researchers that align with your project/required expertise



Known collaborators are a good starting point but don't keep working with the same collaborators just because you know them, it's easy, etc.

Starting Collaboration Early

Essential steps for effective teamwork

1. Shared Interests

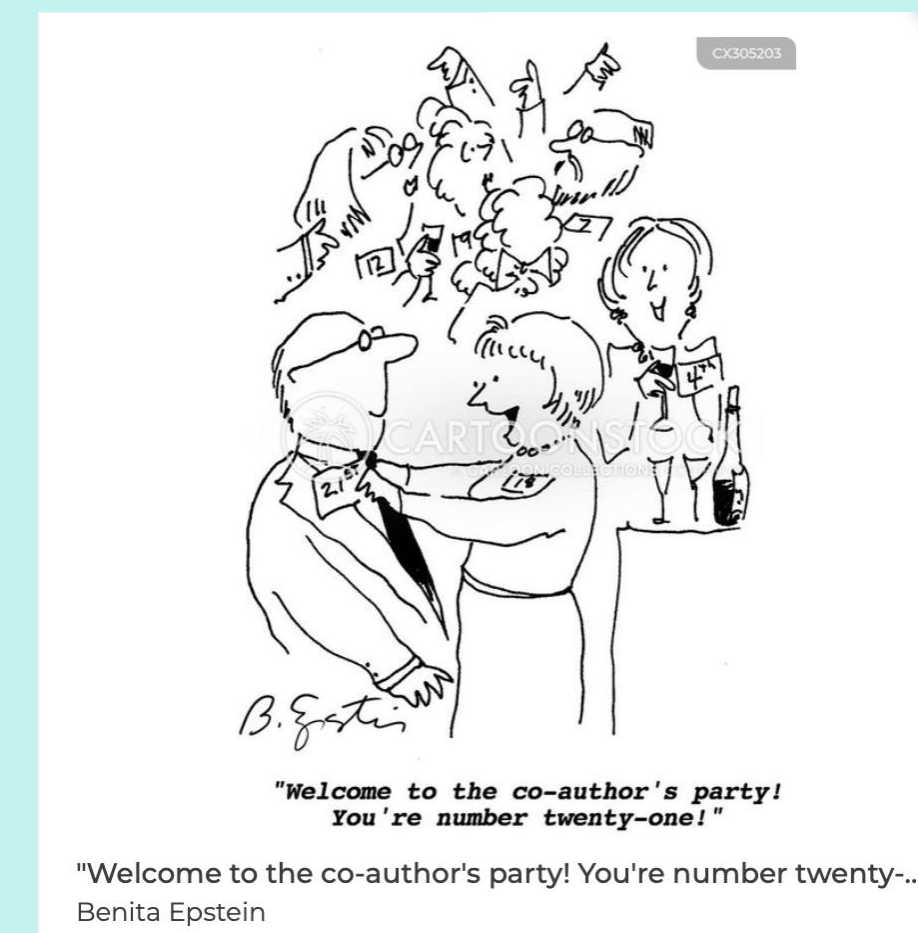
Discussing common goals and interests early ensures all collaborators align their efforts towards a unified vision from the start.

2. Concept note

Co-developing a concept note helps clarify project direction, expectations and defines shared objectives and facilitates smoother collaboration throughout the project lifecycle.

3. Clarifying roles

Clearly defining roles and responsibilities fosters accountability and avoids misunderstandings, ensuring all collaborators contribute to the overall success.



Designing Multi-Country Projects

Principles for Successful Collaborations

1. Leverage Local Strengths

Understanding and utilizing local expertise enhances project relevance and effectiveness, fostering community support and sustainable outcomes that align with regional needs.

2. Align with Priorities

Ensuring that project goals resonate with regional priorities increases the likelihood of acceptance and support from stakeholders and funding agencies.

3. Ensure Balance

Maintaining a balanced approach between participating collaborators (countries/regions) avoids dominance by one partner, promoting equitable contributions and shared ownership throughout the project.



Create a win win situation

Designing Multi-Country Projects

Some Practical Tips

Communication and planning are crucial!

- 1. Time zones, Cultural context (holidays, different calendars)**
- 2. Project Management and operational planning**
 - Planning helps you think and anticipate! (Risk Management)
 - Internal and external influences/challenges -> What you can control and what you have to let go
 - Define clear leadership and governance structures
 - People management
 - Communication (active listening)
 - Empathy
- 3. Managing expectations towards team and funders**



Designing Interdisciplinary Grants

Integrating diverse fields into impactful research

1. Defining (integrated) research questions

Ensuring all disciplines contribute effectively and equally (**Diverse priorities:** Each discipline may have its own goals, incentives, and expectations (e.g., publications vs. policy influence) -> Medical anthropology versus Health Economics versus statistics...



Scope creep...

2. Shared frameworks

Building a shared framework allows collaborators to align methodologies, understand terminology (discipline specific jargon) and expectations ensuring mutual understanding through the project.

3. Mixed methods

Utilizing mixed methods, integrating quantitative and qualitative insights for a comprehensive understanding.

- **Data compatibility:** Data standards and formats differ across fields, complicating integration and analysis.
- **Evaluation metrics:** Funders may struggle to assess interdisciplinary impact using conventional metrics (e.g., publications in discipline-specific journals).

Key Takeaways

- Scientific Innovation and Relevance
 - Generalizability and Comparative Insight
 - Capacity Strengthening and Knowledge Exchange
 - Operational Efficiency and Sustainability
 - Policy and Societal Impact
 - Strategic and Funding Advantages
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- Alignment
 - Management
 - Communication
 - Respect



Thank you

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