# GOOD PRACTICE FOR ENGAGING IN RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

## Working in research partnerships

The principle of "partnership" is core in the research collaboration projects. The research partners must be identified from the early stage of preparing the application (project idea in Phase 1) and partners should be able to contribute actively in preparing application in both phases. The research partnership must be equal, e.g. by ensuring that the project builds on joint activities such as joint fieldwork, joint publications, joint supervision of students, knowledge sharing, etc.

*A successful research partnership builds on reciprocity, trust, mutual respect, and sharing.*

It is clearly stated in the Call text that partnerships should be equal.
Experience from management of North-South research partnerships shows that the optimal and most productive balance between the two sides in a research partnership is achieved when expectations and goals for the project are agreed upon and shared, and when the projects produce mutually rewarding outputs. Both sides must have something to offer that meets a need on the other side. The best projects are driven by a shared interest (even excitement) for the research and not just by compensation for the time invested. Research relationships started as "arranged matches" may outlive the initial funding only if they have developed into genuine partnerships.

The best partnerships are based on personal relations, and can last long even though the initial funding stops. Attention must thus be paid to the attitude and motivation of the involved partners, and the incentive structures influencing both North and South researchers must be understood. A long 'getting to know each other' phase can be required in order to align expectations and roles. This is particularly the case if the partners have had no previous experience of joint work.

A start-up phase will allow the partners to develop a shared understanding of the project objectives and implementation process and to build up mutual trust. There must be time to define the roles and responsibilities of each group of participants explicitly, to adjust the expectations and to define the information needs in relation to the project administration. Furthermore, simple and flexible administration procedures must be established, including the development of a monitoring plan, the definition of measurable output indicators, as well as planning the publication, dissemination and use of the research results. How to ensure future sustainability of the capacity built should also be discussed from the beginning of the project.

The responsible institution must enter a partnership agreement with the research partners. Written roles and responsibilities, as well as stated commitments and expectations from all parties constitute an important co-operation and communication tool for the practical administration of the project. The template for a partnership agreement provided by DFC (https://dfcentre.com/research/general-conditions-and-forms-for-research-projects-2/) is a set of suggestions to an agreement between the Responsible institution and the research partners. It is, however, the responsibility of the respective partners to ensure that the partnership agreement details all their commitments and expectations to the cooperation and follows the rules of the involved institutions.

## Research project leadership

On behalf of the responsible institution, the project coordinator is entrusted to lead and manage not only the scientific part of the project, but also the administration and financial management of the project (with support from relevant staff). The project coordinator's tasks include strategy development and planning, organising the implementation of the project, managing the human resources, and ensuring monitoring and control of project implementation.

As research projects are often complex in terms of the number of work packages and researchers involved, it is important that roles and responsibilities are clearly formulated and respected by involved researchers and staff. At the same time sufficient flexibility must be ensured to make the necessary adjustments during project implementation.

Internal communication and information sharing is an important part of project administration and the project coordinator is the key person to ensure that all project researchers and staff are properly informed of the project progress, or lack hereof, requirements, deadlines, adjustments in plans and budget, etc. To ensure effective project management it is equally essential that the project coordinator receives reliable and timely information from all involved project researchers and staff. The project coordinator must lead the project in an efficient, effective, transparent and accountable manner.

# Good practice principles

Project administration is about organising and using resources (staff, equipment, funds) in a *transparent* and *accountable* manner, and in such a way that the project is implemented as *effectively* and *efficiently* as possible.

The substance of **transparency** is access to information. Timely access to reliable and relevant information about decisions and actions, or lack thereof, is essential to good project administration. It must be ensured that decisions taken and their enforcement follow appropriate rules and regulations, and that information (documentation) is available on *how*, *why* and *based on what regulations* decisions have been taken.

*Accountability* refers to the obligation to account for decisions and actions (activities) taken, assume responsibility for them, and transparently disclose the results of the decisions or actions taken. The project coordinator is accountable for the decisions and action taken in relation to the use of funds, possible adjustments in the project activities, recruitments and selections of project researchers, etc. and must ensure that appropriate rules and regulations are followed.

*Effectiveness* refers to how well the administration of the project supports and facilitates project implementation, the achievement of project outputs and solving problems when/if such occur. In order to be effective, the project coordinator must be responsive to demands and changes in the project, and follow good practices.

*Efficiency* refers to how well project funds are used to achieve outputs. In order to ensure efficient project implementation, among others, the project coordinator must regularly measure the involved researchers' performance, progress in project implementation, resource availability for each activity according to the approved budget, and take the necessary steps to make adjustments if necessary to ensure efficiency during the course of project implementation.

An efficient, effective, transparent, and accountable administration of the project is essential to ensure proper use of project funds and resources and to avoid misuse.