



BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH IN THE SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Summary of a Workshop (2014)

As science has become increasingly international and collaborative, projects involving research teams and research subjects from different countries have grown in importance. These teams often cross disciplinary, cultural, geographic, and linguistic borders, as well as national ones. Successfully planning and carrying out of collaborative efforts can result in substantial advantages for science and scientists. However, participating researchers also face significant intellectual, bureaucratic, organizational, and interpersonal challenges.

The U.S. National Committee for the International Union of Psychological Science (USNC/IUPsyS) is uniquely positioned to contribute to understanding the *process* of international collaboration and how to enhance it. In 2006, the USNC/IUPsyS hosted a workshop that enumerated many benefits of international collaboration in improving social and behavioral research. The 2006 workshop also identified barriers and challenges that can hamper successful collaborations. The committee hosted a second workshop in 2013 (summarized here) to examine approaches to anticipate, forestall, and overcome those obstacles. Participants also suggested methods, procedures, and features of organizational infrastructure that could pave the way to more productive international collaborations.

STRENGTHENING INFRASTRUCTURE

Researchers work within an infrastructure that includes their universities; colleges and departments within these institutions; and also entities such as professional societies, journals, and funding agencies. Some institutional policies and procedures can create obstacles to international collaboration. Workshop participants, many with extensive experience in administration as well as international research, examined how this infrastructure might be adapted or strengthened, and they made many suggestions to facilitate collaborative research in the behavioral and social sciences extending across borders. Carole Ames (Michigan State University), Robin Helms (American Council on Education), and Sonia Suchday (Pace University), made these points:

- Universities could consider adopting international research and exchange of scholars as vital institutional priorities, reflected at every level, including in tenure and promotion guidelines.
- Universities could educate faculty, deans, and other administrators about the value, process, and challenges of international research, including the need for explicit agreements to guide collaborations.
- Institutions could implement effective support systems for training social and behavioral scientists, including developing intercultural competence to prepare them for international collaborative research.
- Universities and professional associations in psychology, education, and the social sciences could include international collaboration in their advocacy agendas.

Lee Sternberger (Office of International Programs, James Madison University) suggested that higher education institutions could encourage their international offices to work with faculty to foster international collaborative research and to promote both faculty and graduate student exchanges.

THE ROLE OF IRBs

The protection of human subjects is a central value in U.S.-funded behavioral science research, yet imposing U.S. assumptions and procedures for Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) on other cultures can lower the possibility of success. Participants suggested how IRBs could adapt to the realities of international collaborative research. Philip Cola (University Hospitals Case Medical Center IRB) identified successful adaptations of IRB procedures that can facilitate research outside the United States:

- Reframe the relationship as collegial and collaborative by conducting face-to-face meetings and co-creating the research protocol/proposal.
- Expand membership of IRBs to include persons from the local community with cultural expertise or partner with an IRB in the country where the research is to take place.
- In multi-site studies, allow one IRB to review and approve the protocol that is to be accepted by all the IRBs at each participating site.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

Workshop participants discussed several challenges that they have faced in initiating, organizing, carrying out, and disseminating international collaborative research. They suggested ways that some issues could be addressed throughout the collaboration process:

Organization and governance: Martyn Barrett (University of Surrey, United Kingdom) and Joseph Tobin (University of Georgia) noted the importance of agreeing on critical aspects of the collaboration at the outset, including leadership, funding, work responsibilities, ownership of data, and publication.

Adapting to local culture: Several presenters, particularly Tobin, Laura Johnson (University of Mississippi), and Michele Gelfand (University of Maryland), stressed the importance of remaining flexible in one's research plans. Methods often have to be adapted to meet the domestic constraints and pressures that collaboration partners face or to address issues that may arise while working with local populations. Gelfand noted that culture infiltrates the research process, shaping the questions researchers ask and the methods they use.

Funding: Jennifer Lansford (Duke University) noted that waiting for start-up funding to be reimbursed can be difficult for researchers in less affluent countries. Funders might be urged to consider the time and effort needed to organize, carry out, and disseminate the results of collaborative international research.

Cultivating relationships: Several participants described how they developed relationships with future collaborators by building networks. George Alter (University of Michigan) pointed to international training courses in secondary analysis of data as places to identify future collaborators. Workshop participants discussed the importance of working harmoniously with colleagues from differing cultural backgrounds, overcoming misunderstandings and miscommunication. Many participants noted the importance of regular face-to-face meetings to build personal relationships. Johnson stressed the value of building trust in the community.

Authorship and dissemination: Charles Super (University of Connecticut) remarked that collaborating partners may be accustomed to different practices regarding co-authoring of research, such as the acknowledgement of graduate students. Merry Bullock (American Psychological Association) noted that journals and associations sometimes set policies governing authorship of publications that may inadvertently discourage international collaboration. Several participants pointed out that researchers often need to share findings with the communities or educational institutions where the research took place, sometimes in advance of journal publication. Some ways suggested to address these issues include workshops for journal editors and university administrators to inform them about the characteristics and demands of collaborative research and encouraging journals to modify authorship and publication policies that may discourage international research collaborations.

USNC/PSYCHOLOGY WORKSHOP PLANNING COMMITTEE ON BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH IN THE SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

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For More Information

Copies of *Building Infrastructure for International Collaborative Research in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: Summary of a Workshop* are available from the National Academies Press; call (800) 624-6242 or (202) 334-3313 or visit www.nap.edu. For more information visit the U.S. National Committee for the International Union of Psychological Science (USNC/IUPsyS) web site at www.nationalacademies.org/usnc-iupsys.