

The Malaria Elimination Initiative (MEI) operates under principles and values that foster equitable global partnerships and a diverse and inclusive working culture. This document provides an overview of suggested practices to support development of global partnerships and collaborations that elevate and center equity throughout the project lifecycle.

Project Design Phase

Partnerships: Best Practices

Relationship-Building

When a funding opportunity has been identified, form partnerships/consortia as soon as possible to ensure collaborative development of the RFP application.

To ensure equitable contributions, once a partnership/consortium is formed, all parties should participate in the development and design of key project elements to be included in the proposal, such as scientific aims and objectives, budget development, and related activities.

Initiate transparent and comprehensive conversations at the inception of each partnership to develop a mutually agreed definition of equitable collaboration and an implementation plan to actualize this definition, with agreed processes for project relevant elements outlined below, i.e., financial management, authorship, etc., formalized under a “partnership agreement.”

Partnership Agreement

Co-develop a partnership agreement between the prime sponsor and the project partner to be included within contractual documents (i.e., subcontract packet) and/or as a standalone document for non-contractual partnerships,

such as academic collaborations, that outlines the following elements:

- *Inclusive Leadership and Project Team Structure*
 - » A Principal and/or Co-Investigator has been identified within the organization that will be responsible for leading project implementation, including consideration of gender equity in leadership roles.
 - **Note:** Each Principal and/or Co-Investigator should be an equal contributor to the development of the project design, and key personnel/project staff included in the process when appropriate.
 - » Agreement during co-design of the project and/or while building an implementation plan to identify and create mechanisms for growth and development for project investigators, key personnel, and staff, with a particular focus on early-career individuals and academic trainees (e.g., formal or informal mentorship opportunities, lab visits or training opportunities at UCSF, support to design and implement professional development plans, etc.).
- *Governance Structure*
 - » A co-developed governance structure for the partnership and project(s), including mutually agreed management and oversight processes for financial resources including specific mention of transparency and accountability.
 - » A clearly defined process to change or amend the partnership agreement or the Terms of Reference (ToR) that guide the partnership structure and governance.
 - » An outline of the roles and responsibilities of each organization and their respective team members.

- **Note:** The partnership governance structure overall should have equal representation of leadership from each partner institution.
- *Collaboration Processes*
 - » Agreement to a regular team meeting schedule, including a standardized meeting facilitation plan and report-out structure that clearly highlights action points that have come from each meeting.
 - » A description of co-developed communication norms for the project, including the platform(s) to be used (Zoom, etc.), working hours, and expectations for communication during non-working hours.
 - **Note:** The partnership agreement may be included as an addendum to the subcontract itself. This document may also be shared directly with all relevant staff at the partner organization for ease of access, i.e., principal investigator(s), project manager(s), grants manager(s), etc.
- *Data Access and Intellectual Property*
 - » Agreement that trainees, investigators, and project staff from all partner organizations(s) will have equal access to the samples, data, and results from the project.
 - » A clearly defined process for accessing and utilizing the samples, data, and results from the project for future projects and manuscripts.
 - » Agreement on final ownership and housing of any intellectual property resulting from the project (e.g., data, tools, technologies, etc.).

Aligning expectations between partners

- Organize a project kick-off meeting to orient all partner organizations to the project to facilitate a shared understanding of the project's vision, objectives, and goals.
- Provide equal access to all project staff to relevant project governance materials (ToR, partnership agreement, etc.) for easy reference via a shared file management system.

Partnerships: Key Performance Indicators

- Number and proportion of new projects where a partnership/consortium was formed to draft RFP collaboratively
- Number and proportion of new projects where project design, including aims, objectives, etc. were co-developed with partner organizations(s)
- Number and proportion of new projects where the proposed project budget was co-developed between partners
- Number and proportion of new projects where a partnership agreement has been co-developed and included as a subcontract addendum
- Number and proportion of new partnerships with equal representation in the governance structure
- Number of professional development and training opportunities (e.g., lab visits, conference attendance, opportunity to present project work/results, mentorship schemes, etc.) made available to partner project teams at partner organizations per grant year

Tools to support implementation: Roles and responsibilities doc; professional development plan template; Terms of Reference template; partnership agreement template, sample data sharing agreement

Authorship: Best Practices

Manuscript Development Planning

- Initiate early conversations between all Principal/Co-Investigators and Key Personnel in the partnership to discuss authorship expectations and agree to co-develop a manuscript development plan that will be revised collaboratively.
 - » Use standardized authorship guidelines for clarity and transparency, for example, [ICJME authorship guidelines](#).

Authorship: Key Performance Indicators

- Number and proportion partnerships where a publication plan was co-developed between partner organizations(s)

Tools to support implementation: Sample authorship agreement guidelines document

Funding: Best Practices

Preliminary Budget Development

- Initiate transparent conversations between all Principal/Co-Investigators in the partnership at the outset of the partnership to understand the total amount of funding available to resource the project's activities, including sharing high-level insights into budget/ expenditure information related to total budget allocation per partner organization, region, output or outcome, or specific budget line as appropriate.
- Jointly iterate the project budget to ensure all critical inputs have been captured and project is appropriately resourced. Project leads may find the budget development considerations checklist useful to facilitate these conversations.
- Schedule an initial kickoff meeting between the prime sponsor and partner institution's operational, grant, and financial management staff to share respective financial management and reporting processes, and co-design an implementation structure that is responsive to the partner institution's internal financial management processes.
- Whenever possible and/or as appropriate, determine a structure in advance of project implementation to compensate partners for extra time committed to project that falls outside of their daily scope (e.g. incentives for Ministry of Health (MOH) and other government staff to attend outside meetings on behalf of the project/alongside project staff, etc.).

- As able, include budget lines to enable partner organizations to participate in professional development and dissemination activities throughout the project lifecycle (e.g. workshop attendance, skills training, conference attendance, opportunities to present project work, etc.).
- Collaborate to develop a risk management plan that addresses perceived potential financial risks for the partner (e.g., delays in receiving payment) to outline mitigation strategies to secure the financial stability of the project.

Funding: Key Performance Indicators

- Percentage of project funding that is being allocated to partner organizations within the country where the project is implemented

Tools to support implementation: Budget development considerations checklist

Research, Project Design and Implementation: Best Practices

Collaborative Project Design

- Co-develop and iterate as appropriate the following with the partner organization(s):
 - » Research questions
 - » Overall project vision and design
 - » Goals of project and definition of success
 - » Implementation plan
 - » Evaluation plan
 - » Transition and sustainability plan(s) for the project(s) as applicable to the defined scope of work, including the following:
 - Clear identification of who will carry forward any project activities required for sustainability, standardization, and institutionalization following project completion at local, subnational and national levels as applicable.

- Development of sustainability plans to define how project activities will be institutionalized/embedded within the partner organization(s) and/or local health system(s).
- Development of sustainability plans targeting subnational and/or national health system(s) to be used by partner organization(s) for advocacy within Ministries of Health, etc.
- Development of sustainable data collection systems and data use activities as applicable.

Community Engagement

- Identify and engage key community stakeholders for project oversight activities as applicable (e.g., development of a community advisory board).

Access to and Utilization of Intellectual Property

- Implement data-sharing agreements between partner organizations when data will be collected during a project, including explicit guidance as to who has access to data and how it will be used.
 - » **Note:** Data should be equally accessible to all partners and permanently housed within the country where it was collected.
- As funding sponsor and prime institution requirements allow, agree to equal ownership of any intellectual property generated from the project.

Tools to support implementation: CAB best practice guidelines; shared project goals/vision SWOT analysis template

Project Implementation Phase

Partnerships: Best Practices

Equitable Access to Resources

- Extend affiliate access to partners to enable access to UCSF data analysis training and management resources, professional and skills development training, and scientific publication databases.

Ongoing Iteration of Equitable Partnership Strategy Implementation

- Conduct semi-annual surveys between the prime sponsor and partner organization(s) to identify any barriers to achieving equitable collaboration within the partnership, and co-develop mitigation strategies to minimize/remove identified barriers.

Tools to support implementation: Partnership Survey

Recruitment and Hiring: Best Practices

- Implement all institutional standards related to fair, equitable, and inclusive recruitment and hiring for any new project role.
- Critically assess the appropriate base location for each role when developing the job description and hire locally/regionally when possible and where appropriate.

Recruitment and Hiring: Key Performance Indicators

- Number and proportion of new recruitments where institutional standards were implemented

Tools to support implementation: Institutional recruitment and hiring standards

Project Dissemination Phase

Authorship and Results Dissemination: Best Practices

Equitable Opportunities for Career Development and Visibility

- Co-develop a dissemination plan that allows for equitable visibility of project investigators and key personnel across relevant global forums, such as international conferences, global consortiums, expert panels, and working groups.
- Per the iterative manuscript development plan co-developed during the project design phase, ensure balanced lead authorship across main project outcome papers.

Access to resources

- Share manuscript development and dissemination skills-building resources across the project/partnership, including free online courses, training opportunities as funding allows, etc.
- More experienced authors may consider formally mentoring less-experienced authors on manuscript development and publication.
 - » **Note:** Mentorship activities may require substantial time commitments. It is imperative that a mentor/mentee dyad clearly define the goals and objectives of the mentoring relationship from the outset, including monthly time commitment, total duration of mentorship, expected inputs from both the mentee and mentor, and communication norms. Implementation of a standardized mentorship agreement may be useful to ensure alignment to the mentorship process and structure.

Tools to support implementation: Mentorship agreement template

Authorship and Results Dissemination: Key Performance Indicators

- Number and proportion of partnerships where a dissemination plan was co-developed
- Number and proportion of publications generated that utilize project data where an author from the partner organization is first and/or last

References

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