



**Lifestyle and Health Research Center,  
Health Sciences Research Center, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman  
University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**

# **Research collaboration: *Guidelines and Good Practices***

**Version 1**

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**“For many of us, the pleasure of doing science lies in formal and informal discussion and exchange of results and ideas with colleagues. That pleasure would be compromised or vanish entirely if each idea were fenced in as the exclusive intellectual property of one person”.**

*Schwartz, Joan P. Silence is not Golden: Making Collaborations Work.*

<https://ori.hhs.gov/silence-not-golden-making-collaborations-work>”

## Introduction

The research in the Lifestyle and Health Research Center (LHRC) is usually interdisciplinary in nature. Therefore, working in collaboration with colleagues either across Princess Nourah University or other higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia, especially those in Riyadh, can offer a wide variety of opportunities for advancing the quality of research in the LHRC. However, as the number of research partners increases, differences can exist due to different expectations. Therefore, it is important to establish good practices and guidelines for research collaboration, as this will certainly contribute to preventing disagreements or misunderstanding between members of the research team. In addition, setting clear guidelines and having an open discussion about expectations can help the joint research run smoothly and efficiently. Indeed, with the right collaborators, who can bring in different skills and expertise, along with clear procedures and guidelines, collaborations should result in more effective, fruitful and enjoyable outcomes.

Selecting the right collaborator from the beginning of the research conception is important. Mismatched expectations and goals or working with the wrong collaborators that do not have the right skills and resources may disintegrate the research project. Research collaborators do not necessarily have to be of similar characters, but they must be trust worthy and respect the way of thinking of other researchers. In addition, it is important for the research team to acquire a partner that can bring to the research group additional expertise and resources as well as different schools of thought.

It is necessary to have a written agreement between the collaborating coinvestigators (coauthors) before initiation of a research project. Such agreement should include exact responsibilities of and specific tasks for every investigator along with early decision on the prospective authorship roles and authors' order. The timelines of the research project from the beginning to the end must be primarily determined by the team members and should specify what each member will contribute. Additionally, it is recommended to clarify how conflict will be handled. Every investigator (author) should be comfortable with the anticipated credit he/she will get from this joint research work.

Before research begins, discuss with all researchers how will the research results be communicated (conference presentations, journal publications) and how soon will the findings be shared after the research is conducted. Agree on authorship at the beginning of the project. If the project plan

changes or takes a new direction (for instance a principal investigator leaves or a new partner joins), authorship arrangement may change as well. As soon as this happens, all research collaborators must re-negotiate authorship in writing. Disagreements or disputes about authorship roles can occur. If they happens, consult the established international measures and procedures to solve such disputes. For more details on authorship credit and how to solve authorship disagreement, refer to the LHRC document on “Best Practices in Conducting Research and Reporting Results”.

Although you need to have a certain level of trust, a collaborating researcher should think carefully about scientific integrity. Opportunities for research misconduct cannot be excluded. Therefore, you may need to have a procedure in place to verify every collaborator's data, especially when data are collected from a variety of places. Collaborators should not feel offended by the idea of having their data verified. If this happens, you do not want to collaborate with such a person, after all. For more information on research integrity, visit the LHRC document on “Best Practices in Conducting Research and Reporting Results”.

When a delay or an interruption in the research timetable happens, it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to intervene. A range of strategies to solve such a delay ranging from gentle reminders to a formal meeting that may help to get things moving again. Recording minutes of meetings and then distributing them to everyone involved in the research project is a way of providing documentation that can be referred to in later discussions and can help resolve disagreements about what was decided in the meeting.

### **Questions ought to be considered when writing a research agreement**

Although each research project has unique structures, certain fundamental issues are common to most and can be addressed by collaborators. The following are some questions or points that need to be addressed when writing a research agreement (*modified largely from reference 2*):

- What are the research issues (or topics), goals, and expected outcomes of such a collaborated research?
- What are the stages of the proposed research and when is the project expected to be completed? Written timeline for each stage of the research is preferable.

- Are all members of the research team in agreement regarding research issues?
- What are the expected unique contributions of each collaborator?
- Who will be responsible for writing any progress reports and the final report?
- How will changes in research direction be determined? What individual is responsible if the research plan changes? For instance, if more involvement of one collaborator in the research work, a new collaborator joined the research team, or if the principal investigator has left.
- What will be the channels for routine communications (formal regular meetings or email exchange, etc.) among members of the research team?
- How, and by whom, will technicians or research assistants be supervised during the data collection, data entry or data checking?
- How and by whom will data be managed? Who will have access to data, whether during the course of the research project or for the long-term stored data after the research is completed?
- What will be the bases and the process for assigning authorship credit or authors' names arrangement in the submitted articles?
- How and by whom will the abstract presentations be made?

## **Policy and guidelines for Research collaboration within the LHRC**

Collaboration in this context is defined as a joint written agreement regulating an execution of a research project by LHRC staff in collaboration with researchers from PNU/KAAUH or an external local institution. *Collaboration of the LHRC with research or academic institutions at national, regional or international levels requires a separate agreement between our host institution (PNU) and the other institution.*

The LHRC welcomes research collaborations from interested and qualified researchers and graduate students. Each collaborator must submit a letter of interest accompanied by a CV to the LHRC. This step can, of course, be preceded with verbal contacts with the head of the LHRC. In this letter of interest, researcher must specify the type of collaboration (see below) and why and how he/she can add values to the researches currently conducted in the LHRC. Certain skills and

expertise possessed by the collaborator that complement those of the LHRS staff or a novel research idea that can be conveyed by the collaborator is what the LHRC is really seeking.

The criteria for accepting the applicant for collaboration are based on opportunities for effective synergy among the collaborating researchers or research group, the collaborator's research skills and expertise that are going to add values to the research team, the novelty and viability of the research proposal, the potential research impact of the proposal and the availability of the resources within the LHRC.

However, because problems can arise in research collaborations, it is essential that any collaborating researcher intends to join the research team in the LHRC to have written agreements signed by the key collaborators and approved by the LHRC before embarking on a research project that is conducted within the LHRC. Typically, the written agreement would specify exactly what the roles and contributions of each member of the research team will be, including the research collaborator, and provides a mechanism for decision making for major issues such as authorship arrangement and the distribution of the research tasks throughout the research stages.

**There are four types of research collaboration with the LHRC:**

- 1- When a collaborating researcher would like to join a research proposal that is already conceptualized and about to be executed by the LHRC staff. Use the Form (RC-A-1).
- 2- When a collaborating researcher has a clear concept and methodology for a particular novel project that can be conducted within the LHRC and would like to collaborate with the LHRC staff in executing such a project. Use the Form (RC-B-1).
- 3- When a collaborating researcher would like to work on data that are already collected by the LHRC and have the potential for further analysis and publication. Use the Form (RC-C-1).
- 4- When the collaborator is a graduate student at PNU or other academic institutions inside or outside Riyadh, and would like to utilize the research expertise and/or facilities of the LHRC in conducting his/her Master or Doctoral proposal. Use the Form (RC-D-1).

Once received, the application request for collaboration will undergo a formal review by the LHRC scientific committee and a decision will be made within 4 week period. Upon approving the application, the collaborator must then provide a formal (official) letter from the respective

department in his/her institution acknowledging such collaboration. In addition, the research collaborator or graduate student is anticipated to adhere to the following regulations:

- The research must meet the mission and objectives of the LHRC.
- The material and human resources required for the project must currently be available at the LHRC or will be provided by the collaborating researcher or through intramural or extramural grant in the nearest future.
- Researchers are expected to abide to the general health and safety rules in the LHRC's laboratories, specified in the "*Laboratory Operations and Safety Manual*" that is published by the LHRC.
- All research collaborators are expected to comply with established ethical standards and good practice when conducting and reporting their research, including an approval of the research protocol from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at PNU or other established institution. Collaborators are advised to consult the "*Best Practices in Conducting Research and Reporting Results*" document that is published by the LHRC.
- All research materials produced within the LHRC authority must be consistent and in compliance with ethical and legal requirements of the LHRC and PNU. LHRC discourages presenting or publishing its research findings in predatory conferences or journals.
- Collaborating researchers intending to engage in collaborative research projects at the LHRC must disclose any conflicts of interest.
- All collaborators (or graduate students) engaging in research conducted in the LHRC must meet and adhere to the requirements of LHRC and HSRC policies pertaining to health and work safety.
- The LHRC is the one who is responsible for archiving the research data, laboratory books or field data collection sheets, whether in hard copy or stored in a computer, an iPad, a machine or an instrument belonging to the LHRC. All data become the property of the LHRC.
- Sharing and reusing of the research data can be granted by the LHRC upon reasonable request. However, in some cases, the release of such data may be judiciously delayed to enable protection of any intellectual property.
- Any research products (presentations, abstracts and full articles) as a result of research conducted in the LHRC, must clearly ensure that the credit and attribution are made to the LHRC (for example: this research was conducted in the LHRC at the HSRC, PNU).

- The research project team is required to submit progress reports for monitoring purpose each four months as well as final report at the completion of the research project.
- Graduate student who plan to do his/her research in the LHRC must ensure undergoing fair amount of training and familiarization on the use of the equipment and the laboratory safety procedures by members of the LHRC staff before starting the data collection.
- The collaborating graduate student must acknowledge the assistance of the LHRC in all reports, thesis or otherwise published materials and any form of media communication that arises from the research conducted in the LHRC.
- If the research collaborator or graduate student is being a leading investigator for a research conducted within the LHRC or using resources or facility provided by the LHRC, he/she must inform the LHRC as soon as possible of any significant divergence from the original aims and directions of the research project or any event or circumstance that is likely to influence the overall delivery of the research project or study.
- Unless stated otherwise, the ownership of intellectual property rights and responsibility for its identification and management is going to be the LHRC and PNU.
- LHRC has the right to designate the public spokesperson for the collaborated research project if the findings of that research end up attracting media attention.
- Even with proper guidelines and best practices in place, conflicts can still occur between research collaborators during the course of research project. When dealing with disagreements, a collaborator should express his/her own point of view clearly and pleasantly, yet always listen respectfully to the opinions of the other members of the research team. The principal investigators should, in a friendly, non-confrontational way, try to help the collaborator identify and solve the problems or deals with whatever barriers keeping the collaboration unsuccessful. If major disputes arise and can not be resolved by the principal investigator (or it involves the principal investigator with the collaborators), it may be time to get a third party involved; in this case, may be the head of the LHRC or even the executive director of the Health Sciences Research Center (HSRC). The decision of the head of the LHRC or the executive of the HSRC is final.
- The LHRC reserves the right to terminate the research project (or study) should the collaborator (or graduate student) places the LHRC reputation into disrepute.

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## References/resources used:

- 1- Schwartz, Joan P. Silence is not Golden: Making Collaborations Work.  
<https://ori.hhs.gov/silence-not-golden-making-collaborations-work>".
- 2- Gadlin, Howard and Jessar, Kevin. Preempting Discord: Prenuptial Agreements for Scientists. The Office of Research Integrity, NIH Ombudsman, the US Department of Health and Human Services. Available at: <https://ori.hhs.gov/preempting-discord-prenuptial-agreements-scientists>.