International Research



Going International: A Practical Guide for Psychologists

Book 2:

Engaging in International Collaborative Research

American Psychological Association

This booklet is the second in a series of introductory guides developed by the APA Committee on International Relations in Psychology to foster international activities. The other booklets in this series are available online at http://www.apa.org/international/resources/publications/index.aspx

Engaging in International Collaborative Research
2nd in a series:
A practical guide for Psychologists

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APA Committee on International Relations in Psychology, 2013-14

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Introduction

The goal of this booklet is to provide an introductory guide for U.S. based psychologists, graduate students and early career psychologists interested in pursuing international research opportunities. It is written to help span the gap between knowledge of sound research practices, knowledge of local ethical and regulatory processes, and the application of that knowledge in international collaborative research.

We have prepared the booklet to provide practical suggestions to psychologists interested in pursuing international research collaborations. Our expectation is that this booklet will help you develop a better understanding of what is involved in conducting international research. This, in turn, will help you decide whether you want to pursue this direction or not. Given our practical orientation, we will focus on essential steps, such as developing a strong knowledge base about the host country and its people, updating your knowledge regarding the status of psychological research in the host country, developing cross-cultural competence, forming relationships with international colleagues, and addressing issues related to IRB processes and ethics.



What are international research collaborations?

For purposes of this booklet *international research collaborations* refer to research projects that involve active participation of investigators whose primary institutional affiliations are in different countries. Although there may be substantial variability in the scope of these international projects, they are all characterized by the joint nature of the research process across national boundaries. In each case, cross-national teams jointly initiate, perform, and report empirical research in an area of common interest.



Why do international collaborative research?

Designing and conducting international collaborative research provides opportunities to generate knowledge, enhance the external validity of research completed elsewhere, extend the range of applicability of existing research, and develop mutually beneficial relationships that can contribute to solving global problems.



The underlying premise is that psychologists working with colleagues from other countries can accomplish

more than those same people working apart. When such collaboration works, it creates synergy and fosters ways of addressing research questions, extending existing research to other populations, constructing meaning, and drawing implications that would not have been otherwise possible. This also means that both partners optimize use of their resources and find solutions to intractable problems. At least this is the hope – and often the promise. Furthermore, the expectation is that the research would be mutually beneficial to stakeholders across national boundaries and facilitate sustainable solutions to world problems.



International Collaborations: Important Dimensions

Developing Relationships with International Colleagues

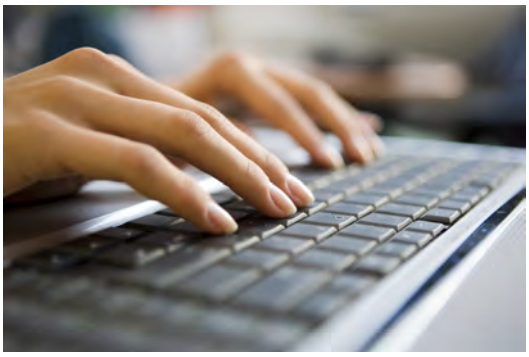
All collaborative activities begin by identifying potential partners with relevant expertise and established records of scholarship and publications. You also will need to decide the country or countries where you will seek a partner. In selecting the country and the partner, you need to answer questions such as the following: What is unique about the



country and the partner that will allow you to accomplish together what you cannot do separately? How can you ensure that the work is mutually beneficial? What will each of you contribute to the whole? In what ways do you complement each other? How will you work together? What difference will you make together? How will you ensure that the outcomes of the work can contribute to sustainable developments? Once you have answered these questions you are ready to identify researchers in the country of interest. You can identify potential partners from other countries through the Internet, national and international associations, conferences and conventions, international centers, organizations, and networks. We comment briefly on these resources.



Internet. Authors generally include their email addresses and institutional affiliation in their papers and publications; you may initiate contact with them by expressing interest in their work and exchanging articles or ideas. The Internet also allows you to join an interest group that focuses on your research interests. This can be a powerful means to initiate contact with others. Professional associations such as the American Psychological Association have made



numerous listservs available through its specialty divisions. Such interest groups offer valuable opportunities to learn from others, express your ideas, and identify colleagues who work in your area of interest.

Professional Associations. National and international associations hold annual meetings where you can attend symposia and paper presentations, participate in interest group sessions, meet other researchers, and share information and ideas with them. You also may do follow-up with potential partners who have complementary expertise in substantive areas and research methodology. In identifying potential partners do not hesitate to consider seasoned researchers. They may be as eager to collaborate with you as you are interested in working with them. They value the fresh ideas, up-to-date methodological skills, and interdisciplinary perspectives you may bring to the proposed research. Thus, this is a win-win situation, in which partners learn from each other.



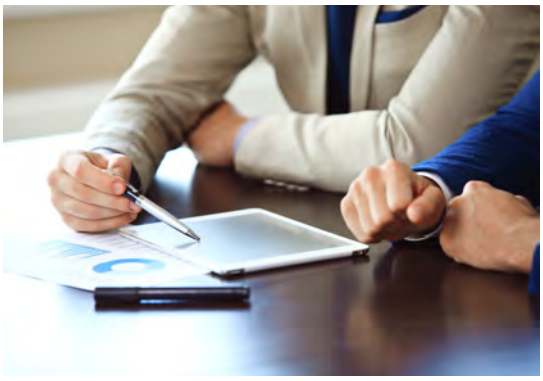
International centers, organizations, and networks. You also may identify potential collaborators through international centers and

organizations. For example, if you are interested in health-related research you may find it beneficial to review the activities supported by the National Institutes of Health, Fogarty International Center that focuses on fostering global health research and reducing health disparities (www.fic.nih.gov). These resources can be helpful in identifying potential partners outside of the U.S. Of course, colleagues from other countries might also contact you about working together.



Working with a Mentor

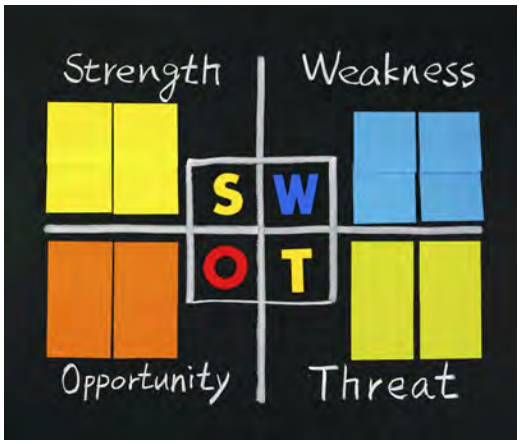
If you are an early career psychologist you may consider finding a mentor who can help you to link with relevant networks, identify potential partners, and learn how to create international relationships. The mentor also may help you in assessing the extent to which you are ready to undertake international research. It also will be useful to maintain contact with the mentor through different phases of your international venture.



Conduct a SWOT Analysis

After you have identified a potential partner(s) from another country (countries) you may conduct a SWOT analysis (strengths,

weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis (Stead & Harrington, 2000) to evaluate the skills you have and to determine whether and how the proposed partnership can assist you in achieving your research goals. Conducting such analysis entails assessing your own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of potential collaborator(s). To create an effective team it is important to find collaborators who can cover your weaknesses in exchange for your strengths. For example, if you plan to use mixed method design for the proposed research and have a strong background in quantitative methods you may find it beneficial to seek a person with strengths in qualitative methods. Once you have identified the strengths and weaknesses the next step is to conduct an analysis of needs in your research area that require urgent attention in the host country. This analysis may indicate the research direction that may foster meaningful collaboration and also may be of interest to funding agencies. Whereas the analysis of opportunities focuses on elements that the collaborative project could use to its advantage, analysis of threats (challenges) draws your attention to







elements that could cause difficulties in achieving the goals and objectives you have proposed. In assessing these challenges, it is essential to focus on appreciation of research ethics by all members of the research team; problems regarding expertise and ethics can be a challenge not only to your reputation but also to the viability of the project itself. It is also critical that you attend to actual or perceived disparities in power and purpose and resolve discrepancies before you proceed.

Negotiating with International Partners

Once you have selected an international partner(s) and conducted a SWOT analysis, the next task is to negotiate with them a number of practical issues. Some key issues are outlined below.



How will the responsibilities be shared for research-related tasks?

It is important to develop an agreement regarding the allocation of specific tasks such as finalizing the research design, drawing the sample, collecting data in the field, conducting data analysis, interpreting the

results, reporting results to the host community, and preparing manuscripts for publication. It can be useful to construct a table outlining the key tasks, their timeline, and the person or persons responsible for each task. This information also will be helpful in preparing the project budget.



Who will obtain IRB approvals? If a U.S. researcher is planning to conduct research in another country, IRB approvals from both countries will be necessary. This means that you need to allocate adequate time to get the required approvals. Many funding agencies have specific requirements for IRB approvals and some of them have their own IRB as well. It is critical to decide in advance what approvals are needed and who will take the responsibility for obtaining approvals.



What will be the scope of the research you plan to conduct? Early in the planning with a colleague from another country, it is essential to discuss issues such as the depth of what you wish to study, the amount of time it will take, the extent to which it will require interaction with the study participants, the number of variables you plan to study, the number of sites you would use to collect data, and the methods of data collection and data analysis you would use. In conducting such conversations it may be useful to jointly use a checklist to determine

whether a proposed research project is realistic and feasible. See Leedy and Ormrod (2010) for an example of a checklist.

Who will be responsible for securing grant support? If the proposed research involves preparing a grant application for external funding, the partners from the host country need to be involved in this phase as well. Given their day-to-day contact with the potential study population, they can offer cultural components that a visiting researcher might otherwise miss.



If the proposed research will be conducted in a community setting, service providers should be involved in the grant writing phase. Full involvement of both the academics and community providers from the host country is vital for a successful partnership. Since many U.S. agencies, including NIH, support international research through a domestic grant with a foreign component, it is common for a principal investigator from a U.S. institution to work with a researcher and/or community providers from another country in preparing the application. It is, therefore, important to share the agency's guidelines with international partners and to





allocate the tasks associated with grant proposal preparation.

Who will own the data? It is important to agree how the outputs (e.g., measurement instruments, data files) of the proposed research will be shared. Agreement in this regard is particularly important because empirical research, whether qualitative or quantitative, often generates data that can be used for testing additional hypotheses. We, therefore, recommend that your negotiations with international partners include a discussion of not only who will own the data but also how the decisions will be made for using data to conduct additional analyses and to report the findings.

Who will publish the results? How will the order of authorship be determined? Negotiating this matter in advance prevents disagreements arising from academics whose tenure and/or promotion may be affected by the order of authorship. Once you come to an agreement in this regard it becomes easier to allocate who will perform various tasks associated with preparing manuscripts for each publication. It also is possible that the partners take turns in being listed as senior author for different publications thereby taking different responsibilities in preparing papers, presentations, monographs, and reports.



Who will share the findings with members of the participating community in the host country, with funding agencies, and with the academic communities in the U.S and host country? In community-based research it is essential to share the results with the participating community before publishing them in academic journals. This allows the researchers to hear the community's interpretation of the results and perhaps learn more from that interpretation. In conducting negotiations with the international partner you should, therefore, discuss who will be responsible for performing this task, when the task will be completed, and how the input will be used in data interpretation and reporting. In addition, negotiation also should include discussion about reporting the results to funding agencies and to the academic communities in the U.S. and host country. In sum, our recommendation is to negotiate in advance who will be responsible for sharing the results with different audiences in the U.S. and the host country, when these activities will be undertaken, and what resources will be needed. Moreover, we suggest that you consider together how participating communities







can experience sustainable benefits from the research and include relevant strategies in your research planning.

Who will deal with local politics? Local politics, administration structures, and regulatory processes vary across countries. Negotiations should therefore include a discussion of who will be responsible for dealing with local politics, bureaucracies, and administrative and regulatory structures. The timeline and budget for the project also should take these tasks into consideration. Note that the implementation of proposed activities will be delayed if the necessary approvals have not been received in a timely manner.

How will partners communicate on an ongoing basis? Engaging in international collaborations requires ongoing dialogue throughout the phases of the project. Face-to-face communication is ideal and researchers should include budgets for visits with each other. However, between visits, communication can be facilitated through phone calls, email, or electronic face-to-face modes such as Skype. Setting up a regular schedule for contact between visits will be critical to maintaining ongoing communication as well as joint oversight of the research project.



Preparing Yourself for International Research and Partnerships

In addition to developing partnerships with colleagues from other countries and negotiating the nature of those relationships, the



researcher needs to prepare him/herself for working in another country. This preparation involves several issues.

What do you need to know about the host country and its people? To work effectively in another country, it is critical to understand the history, culture, and social





context of the host country and its people. Achieving that understanding can happen in several ways. First, you can read literature on the social-cultural-historical background of the country and the people of interest. In addition to understanding the country as a whole, it is important to understand the particular members of the population you plan to study. For example, if you are focused on a minority ethnic group, you need to learn about them and their history in relationship to that of the country as a whole. Second, nothing surpasses direct experience in the culture. Although reading can be helpful, direct interaction with members of the local community is critical to developing an in-depth understanding of cultural norms, values, and beliefs; and to understanding key issues that affect the population of interest. It is advisable to visit the host country and local communities prior to planning your research. Such visits also provide an opportunity to meet face to face with your partners and make more informed decisions about working together and about the topic of your research. Conducting formative research using methods such as





ethnography also can inform your understanding of the culture, its members, and the critical psychological issues that warrant investigation.

What do you need to know about psychological research in the host country? In addition to understanding the country and its people, researchers also need to explore the nature of psychological research that has been conducted in or about the host country. Particularly important to explore are questions such as the following: What psychological theories have been applied to or developed for the population? Who has conducted research in the host country—indigenous psychologists or international researchers? What is the status of psychology and psychological research—what do we know about the 'psychology' of the population? What topics have been studied? What are gaps in knowledge? What methodologies have been used? Is there research that is accessible only in the local language? How can you access that? Finally, how will the existing research inform the project you develop? Certainly, your communication with psychologists or other researchers in the host country will be critical to accessing existing literature, especially if distribution is limited or language is not accessible.





How do you develop 'intercultural' competence?

We adopt the term 'intercultural' for our discussion. Intercultural refers to the interactions across cultures, consistent with the development of international research we have described in this booklet. For example, international research requires communication between research partners from different cultures. Intercultural competence involves broadening of your cognitive and behavioral repertoire (beyond that developed within your own culture) in order to engage in a range of interpretations and behaviors that can be applied across cultural experiences (Friedman & Antal, 2005). Such flexibility is dependent on perspective taking, attention to cultural nuances, interpersonal skills, and a broad repertoire of potential behaviors. So how does one develop such competence? Competence in 'negotiating reality' (Friedman & Antal, 2005) across cultural boundaries results from an iterative professional and personal development process of reflection, inquiry, and action (see Allan, 2003; Friedman & Antal, 2005; Koehn, 2004): (a) Examine your own cultural





background, worldview, identity, and behavioral repertoire. (b) Study other cultures and engage cognitively and behaviorally in challenging your worldview and identity and integrating divergent cultural thinking. (c) Engage in interactions across cultures (even within your own country initially) that require negotiating perspectives and norms. (d) Continue to reflect on your cultural experiences, beliefs and behavior to ensure flexibility of adaptation to culturally different settings. As this discussion suggests, intercultural competence does not just involve learning about the culture of another but requires a way of knowing and interacting that is adaptable to cultural variations and that is constantly evolving. Most important is your willingness to engage in negotiation across cultural boundaries with others.



Concluding Comments

Often international research requires working with others from other disciplines, particularly in settings where psychology is in the formative

stages. Increasingly, tackling issues of global importance is becoming an interdisciplinary endeavor, for example, requiring collaboration among psychologists, sociologists, health professionals, economists, and community experts. Thus, one should be prepared for working in interdisciplinary teams. This will require interpersonal skills for working in group settings such as facilitating group interactions, engaging in collaborative problem solving, negotiating different perspectives, resolving conflicts, and reaching consensus. Competencies necessary to work across disciplines are not unlike those for working across other 'cultural' boundaries. In addition, the process as described in the previous section on intercultural competence will need to be applied at a group level as well.

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Resources

American Psychological Association Office of International Affairs, http://www.apa.org/international/

The Office of International Affairs serves as APA's touch point for international information, activities, and initiatives within APA. It leads outreach and interaction with APA's international members and affiliates, coordinates APA's participation and representation in international venues, and facilitates the change with national psychology associations and global policy bodies.

Fulbright Program, http://www.cies.org/about-us/what-fulbright

The Fulbright Program, including the Fulbright-Hays Program, is a program of highly competitive merit-based grants for international exchange for students, scholars, teachers, professionals, scientists and artists. Under the Fulbright Program, competitively selected U.S. citizens may become eligible for scholarships to study, conduct research, or exercise their talents abroad; and citizens of other countries may qualify to do the same in the United States.

Montreal Statement on Research Integrity in Cross-Boundary Research Collaborations, http://www.researchintegrity.org/Statements/Montreal%20Statement%20English.pdf

This document outlines the responsibilities that are particularly relevant to collaborating partners at the individual and institutional levels and are fundamental to the integrity of collaborative research.

National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine. (2014).*Culture matters*: *International research collaboration in a changing world*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academic Press

This summary of a workshop report highlights key challenges and strategies to address international collaborative research.

During the workshop, global representatives provided input on four areas that can affect international research and agreements within the context of culture.

National Institutes of Health Fogarty International Center, http:// www.fic.nih.gov

The Fogarty Center is dedicated to advancing the mission of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by supporting and facilitating global health research conducted by U.S. and international investigators, building partnerships between health research institutions in the U.S. and abroad and training the next generations of scientists to address global health need.

National Research Council. (2014). *Building infrastructure for international collaborative research in the social and behavioral sciences: Summary of a workshop*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academic Press.

This report is summarizes the discussions from a workshop held in September 2013, that focuses on ways to overcome the challenges associated with conducting international collaborative research. The themes and issues identified during the proceedings are outlined in this report.

National Research Council. (2008). *International collaborations in behavioral and social sciences research: Report of a workshop*. Board on International Scientific Organizations. Washington, D.C.: The National Academic Press

This report provides the papers presented at an October 2006 workshop organized by the U.S. National Committee for Psychology and the National Research Council. Workshop participants included behavioral and social scientists who have collaborated internationally. They considered the results of a

survey of cross-national projects leaders and then brought their own experiences to hear in assessing barriers, challenges, and opportunities for international collaborative research in social and behavioral sciences.



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