

2018 Online KT Conference: Engaging Ways to Engage Stakeholders

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Center on
**KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION FOR
DISABILITY & REHABILITATION RESEARCH**

at American Institutes for Research ■

Engaging With Health System Leaders

Strategies for Effective Research Partnerships

Sarah Bowen, PhD

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Outline

- “Situating” research partnership
- The 5 Ws of partnership research
- Health system/research partnership
- The “How” of health system partnerships
- Discussion/Questions

I would describe myself as

- a researcher
- a health service manager/decision maker
- a clinician / care provider
- in a “hybrid” role — manager/clinician with research expertise/responsibility
- a patient/service user
- a research funder

Health System Engagement — a Personal Perspective

| Role | Engagement Focus |
|---|---|
| Developing and managing community health programs (NFP) | Service users/communities |
| Early involvement in KT movement, KT research | Managers, clinicians |
| Director, Research and Evaluation Unit | Senior Management, managers, university-based researchers |
| Academic faculty member (School of Public Health) | Graduate research students, university bureaucracy |

Moving Toward Greater Partnership in Health Research?

- Awareness that complexity of questions requires multiple perspectives, expertise
- Advocacy by patients and communities
- Funder expectations/requirements
- Various approaches to research participation highlighting potential benefits



Beyond “Two Cultures”: Guidance for Establishing Effective Researcher/Health System Partnerships

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Abstract

Background: The current literature proposing criteria and guidelines for collaborative health system research often fails to differentiate between: (a) various types of partnerships, (b) collaborations formed for the specific purpose of developing a research proposal and those based on long-standing relationships, (c) researcher vs. decision-maker initiatives, and (d) the underlying drivers for the collaboration.

Methods: Qualitative interviews were conducted with 16 decision-makers and researchers who partnered on a Canadian major peer-reviewed grant proposal in 2013. Objectives of this exploration of participants’ experiences with health system research collaboration were to: (a) explore perspectives and experience with research collaboration in general; (b) identify characteristics and strategies associated with effective partnerships; and (c) provide guidance for development of effective research partnerships. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed; transcripts were qualitatively analyzed using a general inductive approach.

Results: Findings suggest that the common “two cultures” approach to research/decision-maker collaboration provides an inadequate framework for understanding the complexity of research partnerships. Many commonly-identified challenges to researcher/knowledge user (KU) collaboration are experienced as manageable by experienced research teams. Additional challenges (past experience with research and researchers; issues arising from previous collaboration; and health system dynamics) may be experienced in partnerships based on existing collaborations, and interact with partnership demands of time and communication. Current research practice may discourage KUs from engaging in collaborative research, in spite of strong beliefs in its potential benefits. Practical suggestions for supporting collaborations designed to respond to real-time health system challenges were identified.

Conclusion: Participants’ experience with previous research activities, factors related to the established collaboration, and interpersonal, intra- and inter-organizational dynamics may present additional challenges to research partnerships built on existing collaboration. Differences between researchers and KUs may pose no greater challenges than differences among KUs (at various levels, and representing diverse perspectives and organizations) themselves. Effective “relationship brokering” is essential for meaningful collaboration.

Keywords: Canada, Research Collaboration, Health Research Funding, Partnership Research, Integrated



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[View Video Summary](#)



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Building and Managing Effective Partnerships in Canadian Health Systems Research

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“Moving knowledge into action for more effective practice, programs and policy: A research program focusing on integrated knowledge”

<https://iktrn.ohri.ca/projects/research/building-and-managing-effective-partnerships-in-canadian-health-systems-research/>



The 5 Ws of Partnership Research



- WHAT is it?
- WHY do it?
- With WHOM should I partner?
- WHEN should partnership occur?
- WHERE does partnership take place?

What do we mean by partnership research?

What do we mean by health research?

What do we mean by partnership?

What do we mean by health research?

- What kind of research?
 - Basic
 - Clinical
 - Health services
 - Population health?
- What counts as “research”?
 - Many different understandings

How do health leaders understand “research”?

- “*Environmental scans*” (what are others doing?)
- Activities that need ethics review
- “*Stereotypical old view — academic work detached from what we are doing*”
- “*Anything that would generate new knowledge*”
- “*One end of a continuum from quality improvement, through to evaluation and ending with research*”

How do health leaders understand “research”?

- *“Scientific methods, research question, generalizable. This excludes QI and evaluation”*
- *“A planned, organized, evaluation of what the best practice is”*
- *“Data that can inform our priority setting and planning”*
- *“Part of a learning organization — one source of evidence to inform innovation”*
- etc., etc.

What do we mean by “partnership”?

- Who are the participants?
 - Inter/transdisciplinary teams (within academia)?
 - Intersectoral teams?
 - policy makers? managers? clinicians? patients?
- Individuals or organizations?

What *kind* of collaboration/partnership?

- From “managed participation” to partnership of equals
- Partnership: *meaningful* involvement in all phases; shared *decision making*
- Many traditions
 - participatory research, engaged scholarship, integrated KT, mode 2 research, co-production...

Who is driving the train?



What kind of train is it?



Where is it going?





Why do it?

- Because we have to?
 - Funder or system requirements

- Or because there are benefits?
 - To both researchers and the health system

Proposed benefits

- Research quality
- Research use
- Accountability and transparency
- Empowerment, capacity building
- Self-protection

With whom should I partner?



Beyond “stakeholders”

- **Stakeholder:** anyone who has a “stake” in the topic
- **Interested and affected parties:** those who are affected by the issue the research addresses
- **Knowledge users:** those we expect or hope will act on research findings



Key principle in selecting partners

- If we want research used, we must partner with those in a position to act on the research — the potential knowledge *users*.
 - These may not be the people the most affected, or those who care the most
 - They may not be the people we most enjoy working with





When do I partner?



When do I partner?

- As early as possible!
 - Before research is planned
- Regularly throughout the project
 - Do not leave to “the end”
 - Share decisions, challenges, early findings

Where does partnership take place?

- **Key principle:** At time and place convenient for knowledge users
 - Find existing forums if possible
 - Visit partners “where they live”
 - Be prepared to have different settings for different knowledge users

The “How”

How to develop academic/health system
partnerships

(What we know and what we don't)

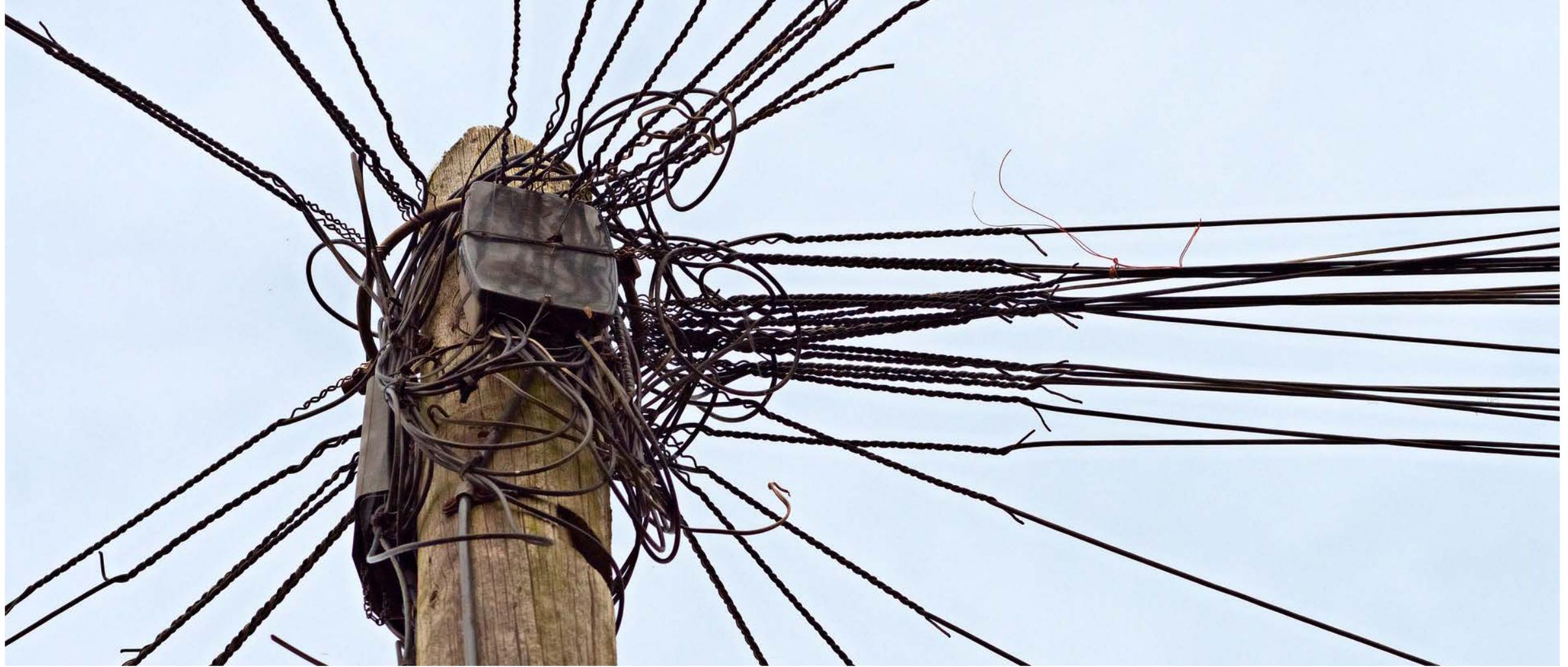
What the research tells us

- Extensive generic partnership literature
 - Potential benefits
 - Challenges of partnership
 - Factors associated with effective partnership
- Consensus on principles, but lack of specific guidance in how to operationalize

Little evidence on health systems research

- Principles extrapolated from community collaboration literature
- Common assumption that purpose of partnership to promote research *use*
- Failure to differentiate between researcher vs. system-driven research
- Voice of nonacademic partners absent





Building and Managing Effective Partnerships in Canadian Health Systems Research

- Overall purpose of research:
 - To determine how effective research partnerships (*focused on health system design and organization of health services*) can best be developed and supported
 - A step back: What are the issues?

Search of grey literature

- Nov 2017–April 2018
- **Web Review 1:** Sites likely to host content applicable to research focus ($n = 46$)
- **Web Review 2:** Sites of all Canadian health regions for messages and applicable resources ($n = 69$)

Focus on websites that:

- Address health system organization and functioning
- Promote knowledge translation or evidence use in health care
- Are home to Canadian health research funders

- Additional sites as identified

Inclusion criteria

- Resources that address:
 - Health system change or health services organization
 - Practical issues of how to “do” research partnerships between academic researchers and the health system
 - not simply theoretical principles

Exclusion criteria

- Limited to clinical research
- Focused on researcher relationships with communities or individuals
- Focused only on end-of-project, knowledge transfer activities
- Addressed only capacity building or assessment of research capacity
- Limited to interaction among researchers

Standardized template for review

- Based on principles for effective research partnerships identified through literature
- Informed by experienced collaborative researchers
- Initial screen by title/abstract
- Full review of resources meeting criteria

From 46 sites

- Only 12 resources met criteria for full review
- 0 written specifically for health system leaders:
 - researchers (6); policy makers (3); other (2); general (2); unclear (2)
- 1 directly addressed the topic of guidance for health system/academic research partnerships around health service organization

Of the 12 resources...

- 10 provided ANY specific guidance (1 for only meetings)
- 7 showed acknowledgement of system initiated research
- 2 gave more than a few suggestions for promoting effective teams
- 2 were short blog posts
- 4 focused on development work

Dominance of “knowledge transfer” approach

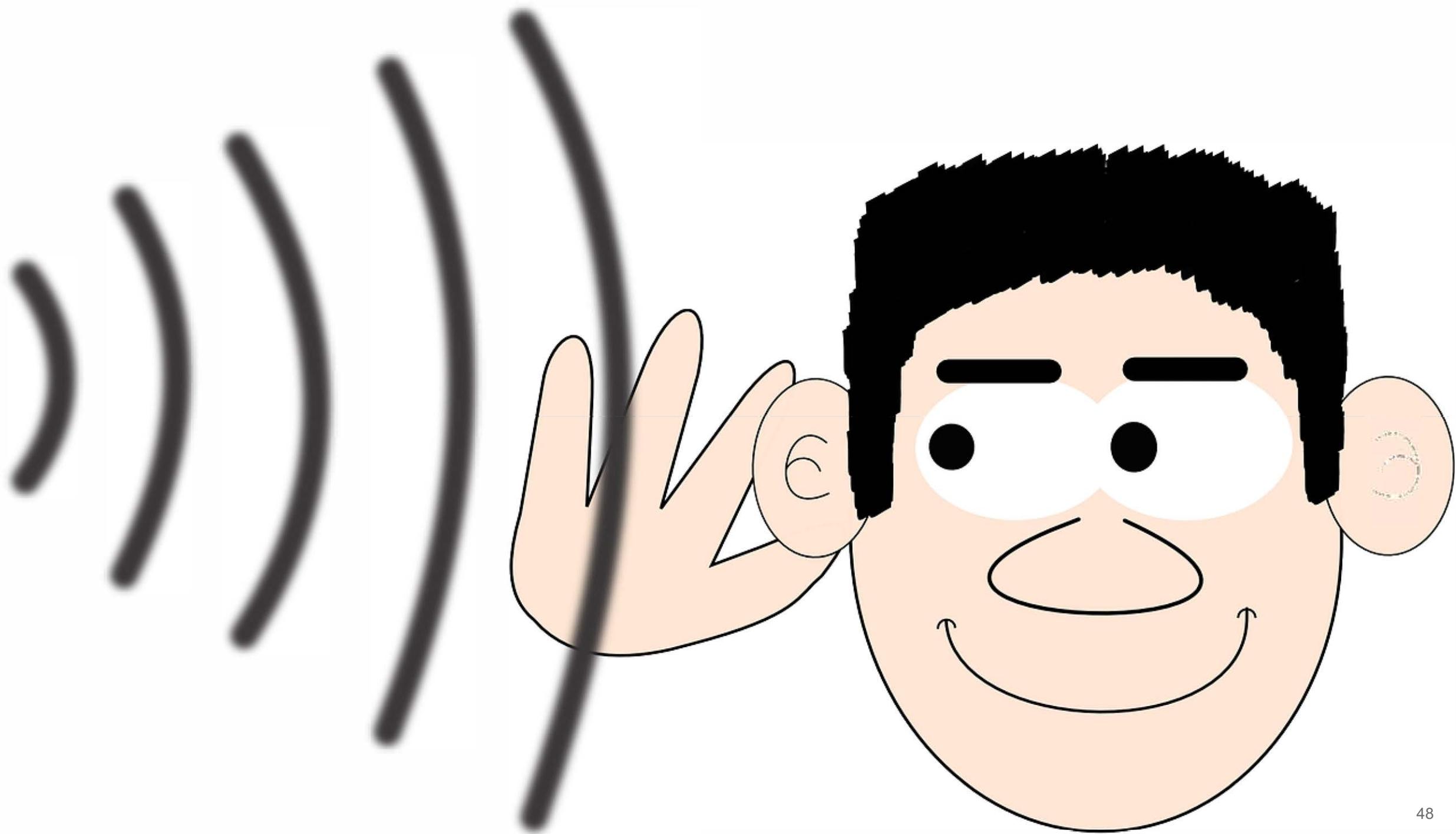
- **Knowledge transfer:** promoting awareness and use of research findings (research already completed)
- **Integrated knowledge translation (iKT):** a collaborative approach to research that engages end users at all stages of the research process
 - Co-creation

Focus of resources

- For knowledge users
 - Developing skills in using research
 - NOT: relationship building, partnership skills, influencing research agenda

- For researchers
 - Communication of research findings
 - Some acknowledgment of importance of relationships







Contrast with emphasis on other partnerships

- Community collaboration
 - (health equity; indigenous communities)
- Patient engagement
- Interprofessional collaboration and organizational partnerships
- North–south research relationships

Why the difference?

- Issue of sovereignty: demand for partnership not coming from health leaders:
 - Relative power – researching “up” vs “researching down”?
- Perceived lack of relevance of research to health services organization
 - Not on the agenda
 - Not useful to inform decisions in real time

Practical Guidance... for Researchers





Prepare yourself

- Learn from experienced collaborative researchers
- Develop skills in researching “real life” questions
- Learn about the organization and its priorities
- Identify those within the organization who are (a) working in your area, (b) providing research leadership
- Focus on relationships



Make yourself useful

- Start small
- Attend organizational events; participate as appropriate in planning activities
- Explore funding for “planning” activities
- Identify and explain funding opportunities



Show respect

- Listen with humility
- Respect time constraints and time frames
- Recognize potential impact of previous negative experiences
- Meet when and where convenient for knowledge users

“It seems like there’s a hierarchy, and researchers are at the top... we are treated like go-fers.”

Practical Guidance... for Health System Leadership



Be proactive

- Develop clear guidelines and criteria for partnerships
- Develop organizational priorities for research and research partnership
- Provide opportunities for sharing organizational activities and priorities with academics
- Communicate, to colleagues, importance of research to your organization
- Explore potential research relationships

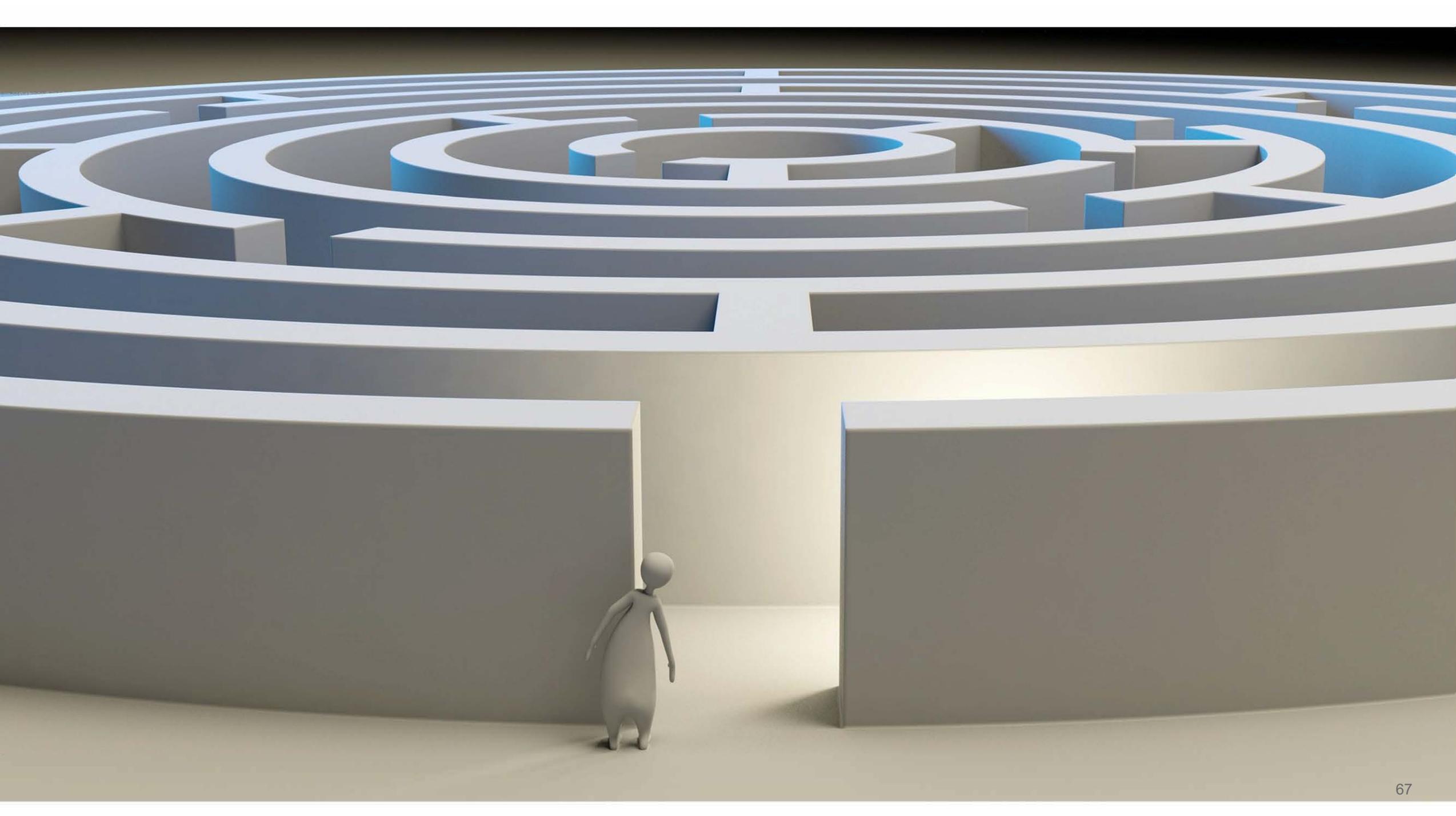


Be firm

- Communicate policy, expectations, and requirements
- Don't feel pressured into “signing off” on something that is not a priority (or on which you have not had input)
- Be clear about internal requirements
- Insist on shared decision making; that organizational costs are recognized

Be realistic

- Select organizational contacts with interest, skills, and aptitude for partnership
- Consider identifying “relationship broker(s)”
- Plan for the time needed to develop partnerships and actively participate in research
- Anticipate impact of activity on operations



Anticipate difficulties

- Have early discussion of expectations, roles, responsibilities, and resources
- Document expectations and agreements
- Establish processes for monitoring, problem identification, and conflict management
- Deal with issues as they arise

Emphasize communication

- Initiate orientation and education sessions to prepare staff for full participation
- Provide opportunities for social interaction
- Ask questions!
- Update research team on organizational activities
- Require regular reports and provide feedback to academic center

Suggestions for Funders

Funding initiatives

- Fund opportunities for partnership development (e.g., planning grants)
- Support development of partnership guidelines and criteria aimed at increasing skills in collaborative research
- Support research into impacts of partnered research
- Review requirements to facilitate genuine participation

Review process

- Ensure review committees include organizational expertise
- Provide necessary training for review committees
- Ensure review processes appropriately assess and recognize established partnerships
- Prioritize proposals that respond to system-initiated research
- Assess adequate recognition of system contribution in budget

Need for change within academia?

- Lack of preparation for partnership work?
 - Soft skills education and practice
 - Values and conceptual frameworks
- Increase orientation and practice in using research skills outside of “formal” research studies
- Address internal reward systems

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Questions?



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