

CSCCE Tip Sheet: Collaboration guides

This tip sheet is part of a collection that the Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement (CSCCE) is releasing in 2021. The tip sheets focus on the different types of community playbooks that a community manager, program manager, PI or other STEM research coordinator might create, with the goal being to create contextualized materials with relevant terminology. We will also be releasing an overarching guidebook on the utility and importance of community playbooks, which will include materials to help you decide what documentation your community or collaboration might need.

What is a collaboration guide?

A collaboration guide is a type of community playbook that is found in research collaborations and other STEM research contexts. Its goal is to support team work by supplementing existing materials that may have been created during the grant writing process or other project planning discussions, with additional information that supports transparent, trust-based interactions.

Orienting considerations

For each type of playbook in this series of tip sheets, we review the same orienting considerations outlined below, helping you to compare the different use cases and decide which playbook format is most appropriate for your needs.

- **Audience** - Collaboration guides can work at a range of scales: from managing multiple projects within the same research group to coordinating across departments and institutions. Depending on the project, the audience for a collaboration guide may include researchers, outreach professionals, evaluators, and educators.
- **Goals/purpose** - A collaboration guide is intended to fuse together the technical aspects of a research project or other STEM collaboration (e.g., the project goals, timelines, evaluation and methodologies) with a shared understanding of the human elements that are crucial for the project to succeed (e.g., where collaborators are located, communication preferences, and setting norms for data management).
- **Names** - In a research collaboration context, the term collaboration guide is most frequently used. Lab manual is one alternative.
- **Formats** - In the case of a large, multi-disciplinary, multi-year project, a collaboration guide may be created at the beginning of the project and shared in PDF or equivalent format. For research groups, it is more likely that the guide is a living document that can be collaboratively edited, in Google Docs or GitHub, for example.
- **Creation** - Ideally, a collaboration guide is created collaboratively at the start of a project to support joint ownership and broad awareness of the contents. Sometimes, team members are assigned a specific section of the guide to write or maintain. Consider peer-pairings if you take this approach, with one person reviewing what the other has added to integrate multiple perspectives.

- **Socialization** - The guide should live somewhere discoverable by team members, such as in the lab's shared Drive, GitHub repo, or on the project's website. It should form part of the onboarding process for new members, either as a foundational framework or an informational item for careful review. If the contents are helpful, they will be referenced regularly and hopefully save much time repeating core information via email.
- **Maintenance** - The guide should be revisited periodically to check that information remains up-to-date. If section leads were assigned when it was created, they may wish to do a brief review of their section every 6 months or so.

Why do you need a collaboration guide?

Research collaborations generally have a set of specific challenges to address, including data and resource management, communicating at distance and scale, and sharing access to a dispersed selection of productivity tools. Creating a collaboration guide can help solve for these needs by collecting relevant technical, philosophical, and process-related information in one place that is accessible to all involved. This is often the kind of information that was delineated in the original grant proposal(s), where collaborations are based on collaborative grants, or it may live in the heads of project leaders in varying forms. Creating your collaboration guide early, and in conversation with your team, will help prevent problems down the line such as inconsistent methodology, data curation, and credit assignment.

What goes into a collaboration guide?

This table is intended to help you think through six core elements of your collaboration to identify the documentation that you need to include. The precise structure of your guide may look quite different to the layout of the table, and you may find that some contents overlap.

Why Project vision	How Programming, policies, and procedures
<p>Outlining the vision for the collaboration clearly upfront helps your team align around a shared goal, and guards against a project veering away from its original intention. Your vision statement might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration overview – a description of what your collaboration aims to accomplish and why it matters to your team and your stakeholders • Collaboration structure – who is part of your collaboration and a high-level overview of how they will work together 	<p>Outlining clear processes for communication, conflict resolution, authorship, data management, and more can help team members work together effectively. If appropriate, you might include information and schedules related to engagement and outreach activities. Some examples of what to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data management plan and sharing policy • Outreach activities • Code of conduct • Publication process and authorship • Funding distribution and decision-making related to funding

What Outputs, metrics and evaluation	Who Collaborators and audiences
<p>What are the expected outputs and outcomes from the collaboration? Are there target metrics everyone should be aware of? Is a formal evaluation planned?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding distribution decisions as relate to performance • Reporting schedule – include deadlines and expectations for both internal and external reporting • Citation list – including expectations for publication and authorship • Metrics and evaluation – what will you measure / how will you evaluate whether the outcomes are achieved? Who is responsible for collecting these metrics? For example, do you need to report back to your funder about publications, additional funding, or media coverage? 	<p>Including information about who is working on the collaboration and their defined roles helps keep everyone connected, while also setting expectations around responsibilities and availability. You may also want to include relevant contact details, time zones, pronouns, and/or regular working hours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership – outline leadership roles and who makes management decisions • Team / collaboration members – outline team members, what aspects of the project they carry out, how they benefit from being part of the group, and special instructions for team members • Support staff – if applicable, list community managers, administrative and fiscal contacts, PR consultants, and when and how it is appropriate to contact each of them
Where Online tools, meetings, and events	When Project roadmap
<p>Providing a table of tools, uses, URLs and administrators can help with setting expectations and troubleshooting technical problems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools selection – clarify the technical needs of the collaboration • Tools list – specific tools in use already, including admin and audience for each • Platform-specific information – platform vendors, maintenance, renewal schedule and relevant payment details, integrations, etc. • Meeting calendar – include when the meeting happens (e.g., first Wednesday of every month), type of meeting (virtual or in-person), who will meet, etc. • Regular communications – share how collaborators should stay in touch, e.g., by email, in a Slack workspace, on a community platform, etc. 	<p>The roadmap describes the timing of key activities, events, opportunities, and deadlines for the collaboration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration roadmap – key activities and deadlines for the next 12 months or grant period • Funding cycles / other deadlines • Publication plan – preparation for publications and timeline • Conference calendar – when, expectations for attendance or participation, goals for the collaboration

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CSCCE uses the CREDiT contributor roles taxonomy to show how the authors listed contributed to the creation of this guide:

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Citing and reusing this tip sheet

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About CSCCE

The Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement (CSCCE) champions the importance of human infrastructure for effective collaboration in STEM. We provide [training and support](#) for the people who make scientific collaborations succeed at scale, we [research](#) the impact of these emerging roles, and we host a vibrant [community of practice](#).

Since 2017, we’ve supported over 60 community managers, program managers, and PIs in developing playbooks or collaboration guides for their collaborative work. If you’d like to find out more about how CSCCE could support you, please email info@cscce.org.

Find out more about us on our website: cscce.org

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