

Academic Institutions and Equity in Global Health Research Collaborations

CUGH Position Statement

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Background: Collaborative, interdisciplinary research is an important approach for better understanding issues leading to poorer health outcomes in low resource countries and communities and for identifying strategies to address these issues. In global health research, power imbalances between researchers and between research institutions, caused by colonialism, historical injustices, geo-political interests, economic oppression, and persistent structural racism, have resulted in poor research practices. These include a failure of researchers from high resource settings to meaningfully and equitably engage collaborators with fewer resources and less power, to support processes that fairly reward those collaborators for their contributions, and to support those collaborators' institutional infrastructure for future research.

This policy statement provides specific recommendations to academic institutions on changes to promotion review and administrative policies with the goal of achieving equitable research collaborations. These recommendations will support individuals striving for fair partnerships and will provide motivation for inclusive engagement. The primary target of these recommendations is academic institutions in high-income countries – institutions that have benefitted the most from power imbalances and have over the years codified some values that perpetuate these inequities. However, these recommendations should be considered more broadly and could go a long way to address inequities and imbalances that exist within South-South research collaborations and in community-engaged research in otherwise underserved and understudied communities everywhere.

Recommendations: Here, we use “promotion candidate” or “researcher” to refer to the individuals whose institutions are directly targeted by the recommendations. Because these recommendations are to address power imbalances, we use “host institution” to specify collaborator institutions in a relatively disadvantaged country or community.

Changes in promotion review:

1. Review promotion candidate's statements on efforts to pursue equitable collaborations. The statement's content should be guided by existing resources, such as these consensus statements, editorials and reporting guides¹.
2. Solicit feedback from host institution collaborators, at multiple ranks, and from institutional leaders outside of high-resource settings and outside of academia.
3. Value any authorship contribution by the promotion candidate, including non-first and non-senior authorship. Expect authorship from host institution collaborators, including in the first and senior authorship positions. Challenge the appropriateness of publications on research taking place in a setting that does not include all relevant co-authors from that setting.
4. Value funding jointly obtained by the promotion candidate and collaborators at host institutions, including funding that is directly awarded to the host institution.
5. Value teaching and mentorship to all individuals engaged in the promotion candidate's research, not just those based at the home institution. Value long term capacity strengthening created at the host institutions, including human resources training and infrastructure support sought by such institutions. Recognize these efforts to build and sustain partnerships as a core part of the promotion candidate's expected activities rather than the conventional nod given for 'service'.
6. Value the promotion candidate's efforts to engage the government, public, or media on scientific issues, particularly in the setting of the research, to bridge the science-public policy gap.

Changes in administrative policies:

1. Increase and individualize flexibility regarding the amount of time researchers can spend away from their home institution when building research collaborations.

¹ <https://associationofanaesthetists-publications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/anae.15597> ; <https://gh.bmj.com/content/6/10/e007632> ; https://rfi.cohred.org/wp-content/uploads/RFI_Reporting_Guide_2.pdf

2. Allow tenure clock extensions to reflect the time needed to nurture collaborative partnerships.
3. Fund extended residencies in the locations where the primary research is conducted. Facilitate host institution collaborators visiting the researcher's home institution.
4. Support teaching and mentoring at the host institutions. This includes removing restrictions for outside teaching and/or reframing this teaching as a core part of the researcher's academic responsibilities. Researchers should be able to reuse teaching materials they developed at their home institutions for this purpose.
5. Provide fair compensation to host institution personnel who provide teaching or supervision to the researcher or to the researcher's trainees. Compensate host institutions for resources used by the researcher. Provide funding for human resources or infrastructure capacity building sought by the host institution.

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