Sigma Theta Tau International Guidelines for International Collaborative Research

Developed by the International Research Committee, 2003

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INTRODUCTION

Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI), Honor Society of Nursing, provides leadership in research to enhance the health of the world's people. Its vision is to create a global community of nurses who lead in using scholarship to accomplish this mission. Advancing the scientific base of nursing practice through research and dissemination of research findings, and fostering the creation of global linkages and collaborative relationships among nursing scholars, leaders and practitioners are goals integral to Sigma Theta Tau's International Strategic Plan 2005. Nursing scientists and practicing nurses are uniquely positioned to collaborate as members of international and interdisciplinary research teams in conducting research that contributes globally to the public's health and well-being. Collaborative partnerships may be formed among professional organizations, academic and/or other service organizations, or teams of individual researchers. In developing such partnerships, challenges lie in the need and responsibility to address issues of research integrity, conflict of interest, cultural relevance, intellectual property rights and academic freedom.

Collaboration in research is recognized as an essential component of knowledge development in nursing and is vital to promotion of scientific nursing practice. The World Health Organization has acknowledged the importance of international collaboration in nursing through the designation of Nursing Collaborating Centers, which have as their mandate to conduct collaborative research of regional or global significance. The International Council of Nurses has developed the ICN Research Network to serve as a global mechanism for exchange of information and expertise related to nursing and health research. To address specific areas of knowledge development and dissemination and to foster research collaboration, international research networks such as the International Pediatric Nursing Research Network and the International Confederation of Midwives Research Standing Committee have been established.

A review of the literature shows that a variety of collaborative and partnership models for research have been proposed (Dufault & Sullivan, 2000; Lengacher & Mabe, 1992). There is an expanding literature on research teams that identifies issues and processes for team building and collaboration (Bhopal et al., 1997; Broome, 1991; Csokasy, 1997a, 1997b; DuPont, 1991; Erlen, Siminoff, Sereika, & Sutton, 1997; Fain, 1996; Freund et al., 1999; Gueldner, 1996; Kengeya-Kayondo, 1994; Kone et al., 2000; Lengacher et al., 1995; Thiele, 1989; Zachariah & Lundeen, 1997). These published experiences and guidelines for collaborative research suggest issues that must be considered when establishing, planning, conducting, disseminating and evaluating international collaborative research.

At the direction of the STTI Board of Directors, the International Research Committee has developed the following guidelines for development and implementation of international collaborative research projects. Ongoing evaluation of the roles and responsibilities of research team members is an important component of the process.

GUIDELINES

Phase I. Establishing the Collaborative Partnership

Step 1. *Establish a team spirit among leaders of the teams and organizations in the collaborative partnership.*

A. Discuss potential research topics of interest to leaders of involved organizations.
B. Determine the leaders of the research team/projects who may or may not be the same as the leaders of the organizations.
C. Determine the role and responsibility of each organization.
D. Develop specific strategies and activities to build a team spirit.

Step 2. *Define the major benefits of research collaboration related to:*

A. Increased opportunities
B. Enhanced contributions to nursing science and practice
C. Mentoring of novice researchers
D. Providing resources to developing countries
E. Facilitating access to new and/or specific populations

Step 3. *Determine the aims/purpose/goals and desired outcomes of the proposed project considering the perspectives of each investigator and each organization.*

A. Outline the international significance of the research problem.
B. Identify the scientific benefits of the research.
C. Determine what contributions the research will make to practice and to knowledge development.

Step 4. *Determine the international issues related to research between/among countries, including assessment of the following:*

A. Language issues and translation requirements for all aspects of the research project, e.g., communication; planning discussions; written components such as proposals, protocols, instruments
B. Communication mechanisms available between the research partners, e.g., e-mail, fax, global mail
C. Types of communication records, e.g., minutes, newsletters, video conferencing
D. Differences between countries in time scheduling for the research study, including planning, implementation and data collection, e.g., academic calendars, staffing schedules in facilities
E. International differences in requirements/procedures for protection of human participants in research

Step 5. *Identify and assess resources needed and available to complete the research project collaboratively.*

A. Personnel resources needed and available at each site, e.g., secretarial staff, data collectors, data analysis, translation services
B. Single discipline or interdisciplinary membership
C. Financial resources needed and available, e.g., support of personnel resources, computers, software
D. Communication resources
E. Potential consultants needed and available
F. Resources which have been determined can be shared or will need to be site specific.

Step 6. *Define the roles of research team members.*

A. Designate principal investigator (Co-PIs) and co-investigators.
B. Define responsibilities of principal and co-investigators, e.g., site specific or overall, recruiting subjects, collecting, organizing, managing, and analyzing data and reporting results.
C. Identify potential members of the research team, including students, clinical staff and other disciplines, and determine roles.
D. Determine process for approval or disapproval of suggested publications.

Step 7. *Establish a process for intellectual property.*

A. Construct a written agreement that defines and confirms processes and ownership of intellectual properties.
B. Determine criteria or standards for authorship of articles and other written materials resulting from the collaboration.
C. Discuss potential abstract submissions for presentations and posters.
D. Determine who will be responsible for data collection, data maintenance and data analysis and where data will be stored.

Phase II. Establishing the Research Team

Step 1. *Match roles to team members and assign responsibilities.*

A. Define the responsibilities of each member of the research team.
B. Identify and match joint members in each organization according to goals and aims of the study, expertise, and compatibility.
C. Establish communication responsibilities and linkages for the total team and for individual team members.

Step 2. *Strategize and develop activities to build team relationships.*

A. Concentrate on positive outcomes.
B. Maintain of clear verbal and written communication between and within research groups.
C. Adher to group determined goals.
D. Respect for the expertise of each member's contribution to the team.

Phase III. Implementing the Project

Step 1. *Plan, conduct and manage the project.*

A. Design the project.
B. Describe how the research will meet requirements for scientific integrity.
C. Define how each site will meet the ethical requirements for research involving human subjects (Institutional Review Board or corresponding body).
D. Outline a timetable for the project.
E. Establish analysis processes.
F. Develop a formative written evaluation process to monitor the progress of the project.
G. Determine who will assume the responsibilities if members of the team leave.

Step 2. *Revisit the responsibilities of team members in regard to project needs.*

A. Discuss phases of team building in the implementation phase.
B. Orient team members and other stakeholders to the project.
C. Develop a team-player culture, valuing roles of all members.

1. Adaptation and flexibility related to the project or changes that may be required.
2. Acceptance and transition to change or completion of the project
3. Recognition and reward for all team members.

D. Establish mechanisms to deal with team issues and determine appropriate standards of behavior.
1. Serve as role models for effective team building (Leaders in the partnership, P.I. and Co-P.I.).
2. Assist members who miss deadlines and submit incomplete work that can affect the outcomes of the project.
3. Revisit deadlines that may be unattainable or inappropriate. If setbacks occur, do not establish blame but work positively within the team to handle them. Concentrate on using energy to search for solutions.

Step 3. *Communicate during implementation.*

A. Set meeting schedule, determining meetings of the whole team, as well as meetings/communication between matched team members at collaborating sites.
B. Determine mechanism for calling unscheduled team meetings and what type of communication system will be utilized.

Phase IV. Evaluating the Outcomes of the Project

Step 1. *Evaluate the scientific findings, their significance and their application to practice and to knowledge development.*

A. Conduct formative and summative evaluation.
B. Explore significant impact on health status/patient care.
C. Include feedback from all team members.

Step 2. *Evaluate the dissemination of project findings.*

A. Revisit the contract for authorship based on contribution to the project and the writing.
B. Determine the number of publications and the authors, and identify members' contributions.
C. Determine where to submit additional abstracts for further presentations and posters, authorship and identify presenters.

Step 3. *Determine possible extensions of the research or "spin-off" projects, how to implement these, and who will be responsible.*

A. Develop a timeline.
B. Assign responsibilities to team members.

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