



“Collaboration Agreement” Learning Object

Link to online version: <https://fl-rda.org/collaboration-agreement-learning-object/>

Title	Collaboration Agreement																
1-sentence summary	A tool that facilitates a shared purpose and sets expectations for team communication and behavior for team success.																
Time to implement	60-90 minutes																
Purpose of tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create open discussion on a team’s purpose, goals, responsibilities, processes, and communication preferences • Have a written agreement that documents points of consensus related to team functioning and serves as an accountability tool • Set team norms, expectations, and guidelines to be referenced later and when conflicts arise 																
Example output	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Collaboration Agreement Example</u></p> <p><u>Overall Purpose:</u></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>What is the overarching vision for the team project?</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore whether/how common factors in deterioration of Florida’s coastlines can be understood in a unifying framework of “coastal organic enrichment.” • Use our interdisciplinary expertise to think about the coastal organic enrichment problem in a novel way. </td> </tr> <tr> <td>What are the goals, anticipated outcomes, and products of the collaboration?</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together to identify a gap, produce a review paper, investigate the possibility of an outreach activity, and possibly look for funding either as the next step of the review paper or to fund a program. </td> </tr> </table> <p><u>Roles, Responsibilities, & Project Management:</u></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>How will the team manage shared leadership responsibilities?</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide major goals and outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Jim and Beth lead review paper ◦ Mary and Laure lead workshop development </td> </tr> <tr> <td>How will we hold each member accountable for doing their part?</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer pressure as appropriate, help as needed • Clear expectations and timelines • Email list of “<u>to-dos</u>” after each meeting </td> </tr> <tr> <td>How will important decisions be made? 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The steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce this activity as an opportunity to create an open dialogue around the goals and processes of the team, and to discuss how to have a productive working relationship among members. <i>(Note: Open discussions will be possible in this activity only if there is a level of trust and “psychological safety,” where honest opinions and concerns can be shared.</i> 																

	<p>See the section below “What if I want to learn more?” for ways to foster trust among team members.)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Present the Collaboration Agreement template and provide everyone a few minutes to scan through the sections and questions. 3. Next, beginning at the top of the document (or another section that the team decides to prioritize based on the team’s needs), the team should work question by question, either typing into a shared document or vocalizing their ideas in response to each question. 4. If a facilitator is organizing this activity (a facilitator can be external to the team or a volunteer from within the team), they can assist in documenting the ideas that are vocalized. This person can also be responsible, once all ideas are expressed for a given question, for drafting a summary statement, as relevant, that captures the team’s overall feelings for that question. This statement should not replace the team members’ individual responses but can help serve as a summary of the consensus on the topic. Additionally, all team members should have the opportunity to refine the summary statement, either live during the activity or offline post-activity. If a facilitator is not used, team members may take turns generating summary statements as the group moves through the questions. It is important that the summary statements are not biased toward a subset of members and that they represent the contributions or agreed-upon direction of the entire group. <i>(Note: In some cases, an agreed-upon set of steps will be more relevant than a single summary statement in response to a given question.)</i> 5. During the activity (or as a follow-up, if needed), all members should review and reflect on the responses to the questions to determine if there are any areas that need further discussion to gain full agreement. <i>(See the “Key guidance” section below on how to handle disagreements.)</i> 6. Once all discussion has completed, ask for a final agreement, verbal or written, from each member of the group and note at the bottom of the agreement when the document will be revisited or revised. The team may agree to revisit the agreement quarterly to ensure they are abiding by their team norms and processes, or when a specific event occurs such as a new member joins the team or a new activity is begun within the group (e.g., at the start of writing a publication or grant proposal).
<p>Key guidance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether the team is new or established, it is important to pay attention to team dynamics as the activity is unfolding. If there are team members who are not contributing, they can be invited to voice their thoughts. It can be better to provide an open opportunity for anyone who has not contributed to

	<p>do so, as opposed to calling on particular individuals. On the other hand, some quieter group members may benefit from someone create space for them to specifically contribute. The goal is for the final agreement to reflect the whole group’s shared vision and expectations for collaborating.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As noted in the instructions above, open discussions will be possible in this activity only if there is a level of trust and “psychological safety,” where honest opinions and concerns can be shared. See the section below <i>“What if I want to learn more?”</i> for ways to foster trust among team members. • This learning object can be paired with the Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down activity to gauge team agreement or disagreement levels in response to individual questions or the overall document. • If there is disagreement on a question, this indicates the need and opportunity for further discussion. Think carefully about how the scheduled time should be spent—is it most productive for the team to spend more time working together, in that moment, to establish a team process for working through disagreement? Or, if time is limited and priority needs to be given in the moment to other topics, should the team instead document the diverse perspectives expressed at the time, and then schedule additional time to revisit the question(s) at the next team meeting? Alternatively, if what is needed is more information to reach agreement, consider accessing resources like those listed below for authorship and credit to read more about the topic at hand to facilitate additional conversation. • In cases where certain sections of the collaboration agreement may not be relevant for the stage of the team, these sections can be tagged for revisiting at a future time. For example, for newly formed teams that are in the earliest stages of ideation, the authorship questions may be tagged for revisiting before, say, a publication writing process begins. However, it may be helpful even at the start of a team process to understand everyone’s feelings on how authorship and credit should be assigned.
<p>The outcome</p>	<p>A written agreement that sets the stage for healthy team engagement.</p>
<p>Example use cases</p>	<p>This activity can be helpful for groups in multiple settings, described as use cases below. The first example relates to interdisciplinary teams launching into grant proposal writing, and the second helps establish norms in a research laboratory.</p> <p>Commencement of Interdisciplinary Grant Proposal Writing</p> <p>Creating a collaboration agreement can be beneficial for a team</p>

	<p>after a grant opportunity has been selected to pursue and members have been identified. This is especially the case for a large effort that will involve team members from multiple disciplines or different career stages. With a diverse group of players, there can be varying ideas of what to pursue, how to lead, and how to communicate. With this agreement, many of these issues that could serve as stumbling blocks for the team will be discussed <i>before</i> they cause an issue. The written agreement includes plans for how the team will deal with different types of issues that arise. Additionally, it helps all members of the team (PIs, Co-PIs, other personnel) understand their roles and responsibilities on the project and in the grant writing process.</p> <p>This agreement has the additional benefit of forming the basis for supplementary grant proposal documents such as the “Multi-PI Leadership Plan.” Alternatively, ideas from the agreement can be summarized in the main project narrative or within budget justification documents to explain how team members will work together and make decisions about the project.</p> <p>Establishing Rules and Operations for a Research Lab</p> <p>Another context that greatly benefits from established norms and procedures is the operation of a research laboratory. Whether initiating a new lab or having a desire to align understanding among existing team members, a collaboration agreement can be an effective tool. This tool can be used in much the same fashion described above, with the additional feature that there is likely an established leader, the laboratory director or Principal Investigator, who is likely to facilitate the activity and have the final decision-making power in how the team functions. That said, this activity is helpful to aid discussion among lab members and agree on common practices. It also serves as a document that can be shared to onboard new lab members to help them understand the lab’s ongoing goals, processes, and rules.</p>
Q&A:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When should this be applied? 	<p>This exercise is applicable as a team is forming or for one that has recently formed and is particularly helpful early in the team’s meetings to establish a strong foundation for collaboration.</p> <p>It can also be helpful to implement or revisit when new members join a team or members leave, or when the team embarks on a new endeavor, to ensure everyone’s roles and responsibilities are clear and the processes for collaborating will be functional in the new state or direction of the team.</p> <p>This tool can be helpful as a “reset” for a long-running team or for one that wants to “up its game” if there are some unhealthy or unproductive behaviors being engaged in, and to surface</p>

	<p>opportunities for further improvement. It is a neutral document that opens up discussion and helps gather input from all team members to work toward a better functioning group dynamic.</p>
<p>- When <i>not</i> to use this?</p>	<p>This tool may not be as effective or well-received midway through a collaboration without a reason for the team to reexamine its processes (e.g., adding a lab member, embarking on grant writing, failing to meet milestones). That said, the collaboration agreement, when integrated as part of how the team operates, will be helpful at any time for teams to assess what is working and what is not, and for clarification of expectations and goals.</p> <p>Additionally, it is essential that the members participating in this activity trust others in the group and feel “psychologically safe.” If the team environment is not one in which people feel comfortable being honest about their opinions and concerns, asking questions when things are unclear, and showing respect for what others contribute, then this activity will not be productive.</p> <p>Given the substantial time needed to complete the document, it is likely most practical in teams that will be together for a significant period of time (i.e., months or longer). For shorter collaborations, more focused discussions on project plans and communication norms is likely more important than creating a comprehensive collaboration agreement.</p>
<p>- What should I do next?</p>	<p>Once this tool is applied, it is good to revisit this document to confirm that everyone is still in agreement with and remembers what the team established. The timeline and number of revisits depend upon the length of the project or engagement. For a team that will be together for a semester, a revisit may only be necessary once. For longer projects, the team may agree upon a revisit schedule that could be quarterly, biannually, or annually. See other ideas for when to revisit this document in response to the question “<i>When should this be applied?</i>”</p>
<p>- What evidence or sources is this based on?</p>	<p>The sections and questions for this collaboration agreement tool are based on two existing collaboration guides listed below, with the goal in the current version to reduce the length of the document to a subset of items.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Institutes of Health’s Office of the Ombudsman’s “Sample Partnering Agreement Template” • The “Collaboration Agreement Template” developed by Bennett, O’Rourke, & Cardenas (2022)
<p>- What if I want to learn more? What are other complementary</p>	<p>Team Science Field Guide</p> <p>The NIH National Cancer Institute’s “Collaboration and Team Science Field Guide” is a valuable source for information on</p>

tools?	<p>collaborative team science. Information pertinent to this activity can be found in Chapters 4-6 in the guide, which pertain to building research teams, fostering trust, and developing a shared vision. Additionally, Chapter 8 provides additional information related to credit and sharing.</p> <p>Authorship and Credit</p> <p>There are several resources for thinking about and determining authorship and credit listed below. These may be accessed ahead of completing a collaboration agreement or when beginning a project or publication writing period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>CRediT (Contributor Roles Taxonomy)</u>• <u>“Determining Authorship” article</u>• <u>Authorship Determination Scorecard</u>
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Collaboration Agreement Example

For guidance on using this tool: <https://fl-rda.org/collaboration-agreement-learning-object/>

Note: The example provided below is brief for demonstration purposes. Most uses of this template will include more and longer answers in response to each question, which may be summarized into summary statements like those captured below.

Overall Purpose:

What is the overarching vision for the team project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore whether/how common factors in deterioration of Florida’s coastlines can be understood in a unifying framework of “coastal organic enrichment.” • Use our interdisciplinary expertise to think about the coastal organic enrichment problem in a novel way.
What are the goals, anticipated outcomes, and products of the collaboration?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together to identify a gap, produce a review paper, investigate the possibility of an outreach activity, and possibly look for funding either as the next step of the review paper or to fund a program.

Roles, Responsibilities, & Project Management:

How will the team manage shared leadership responsibilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divide major goals and outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Jim and Beth lead review paper ○ Mary and Laure lead workshop development
How will we hold each member accountable for doing their part?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer pressure as appropriate, help as needed • Clear expectations and timelines • Email list of “to-do’s” after each meeting
How will important decisions be made? (e.g., changes, budget, data)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team meeting discussions • Thumbs up/down voting by each team member
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How, and by whom, will information and data be managed and stored long term?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zotero to manage citations and cite while you write • Google Docs for working drafts of deliverables

Communication:

What will our communication norms be? (e.g., frequency, meetings, tools, defining terms, how to deal with non-communication)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Biweekly meetings, emails in between• Relates to team norms and functioning section—we can establish roles during different meetings for individuals to keep track of management of conflict, etc.
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Team Norms & Functioning:

How do we ensure we leverage differences in the team? (e.g., opinion, expertise, work styles, personality)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Follow-ups: “What do you mean by X? Can you explain more?”• Discuss different roles members can play on a team
How will we ensure it is safe to take risks and raise concerns?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thank others for their contributions, call on quiet members and ask for their opinion (and show you value it), engage in healthy debates
How will we ensure all input is regarded as valuable?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respect, willingness to listen (willingness to be quiet)• Keep notes on what everyone says in meetings and in versions of documents
How will we manage conflicts that arise? (e.g., scientific, interpersonal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have someone assigned to this task and open lines of communication, discussing at team meetings when they arise

Authorship & Credit:

What will be the criteria and process for assigning authorship and credit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss at team meeting in relation to specific products• First/last authorship very important for some people (e.g., pre-tenure)• Lead author also depends on expertise each brings to the product• Will also depend on the contributions each makes, and should make a separate agreement before writing about author order
How, and by whom, will presentations be made and publications be written?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss who is available, though all are welcome to contribute• See above for issues of author order and credit

*How often will we review this agreement?

Quarterly, or as needed (e.g., if begin writing a paper or grant proposal)



Collaboration Agreement – [Team Name]

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