



Centre for Capacity Research

*Advancing the science of capacity
strengthening for sustainable development*

How to manage research consortia

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Session Outline

Training Objectives

1. Knowing the processes involved in consortium management
2. Identifying and assessing tensions that emerge when managing consortia
3. Determining the appropriate management strategies
4. Approaching the management of your consortium and what to consider

Session Structure

- Processes, tensions, strategies, and considerations: ~45-minute presentation
- Q&A: ~30-minute 'clinic' format
- Useful resources

Introduction

Based on learning from:

- Research on African-led multi-country health research capacity strengthening consortia (DELTA Africa)

(Manuscripts in preparation)

- Review of published literature

Tagoe et al (2019). "**Managing health research capacity strengthening consortia: a systematised review of the published literature.**" BMJ Global Health **4**(2): e001318.

- Grey literature

Including guidance documents and tools

Will also draw on your experiences (note these in chat for discussion at the end)

What is a consortium?

A group of two or more individuals or organisations working together to achieve a **common objective**

Shared responsibility, authority and accountability

(Chrislip & Larson 1994)



Why have consortia?

- The nature of health – complex, multidisciplinary, global
- Address common challenges
- Synergy - pooling expertise and resources and consolidating efforts
- Cross-fertilization
- Shared learning and capacity strengthening



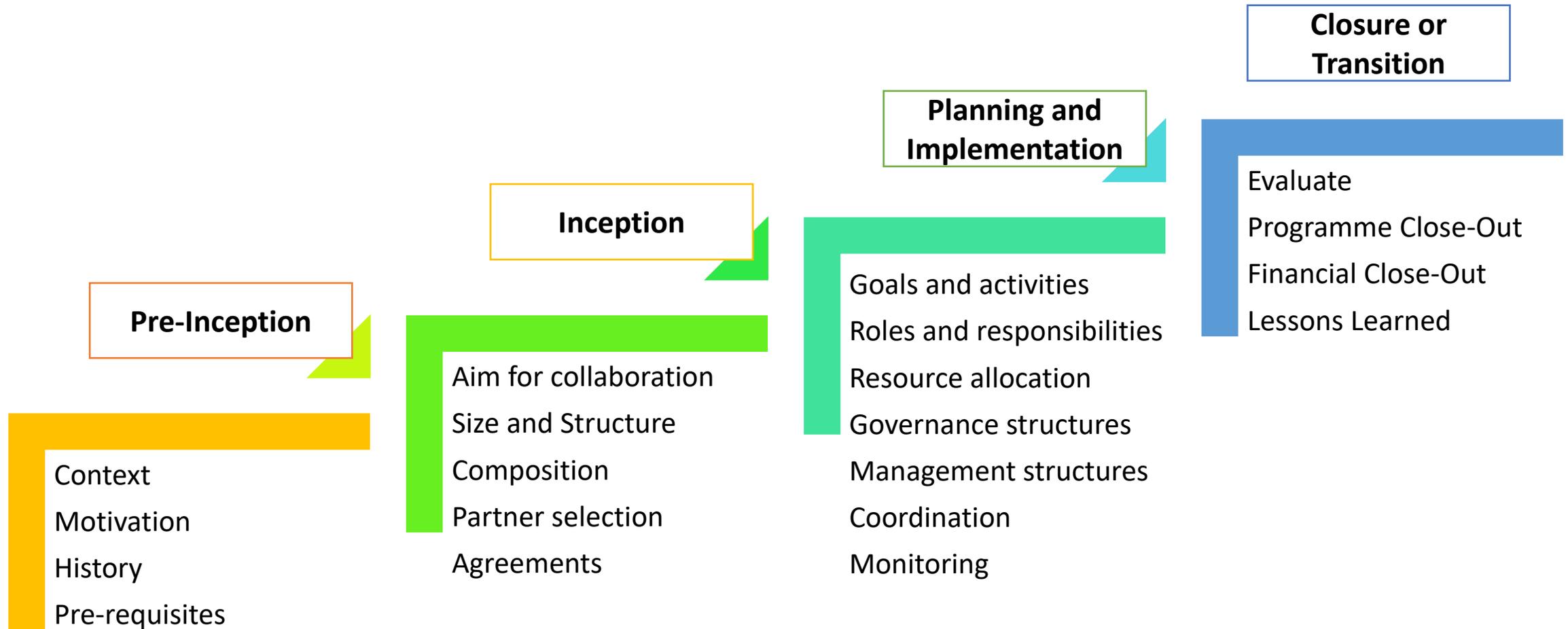
Why is it important to pay attention to the managerial aspects of research consortia

Features considerably in consortia discourse (equity, power, etc.) but receives less attention in planning and resources

Cannot be compartmentalized

Contributes to overall consortia outcomes

What does consortium management entail?



Consortium management processes and practices



Similarities

Management structures and
processes



Differences

Strategies adopted in executing
each management process

Realities of decision-making and tensions

Decision-making is complex as leaders need to navigate tensions between compelling strategy options such as:

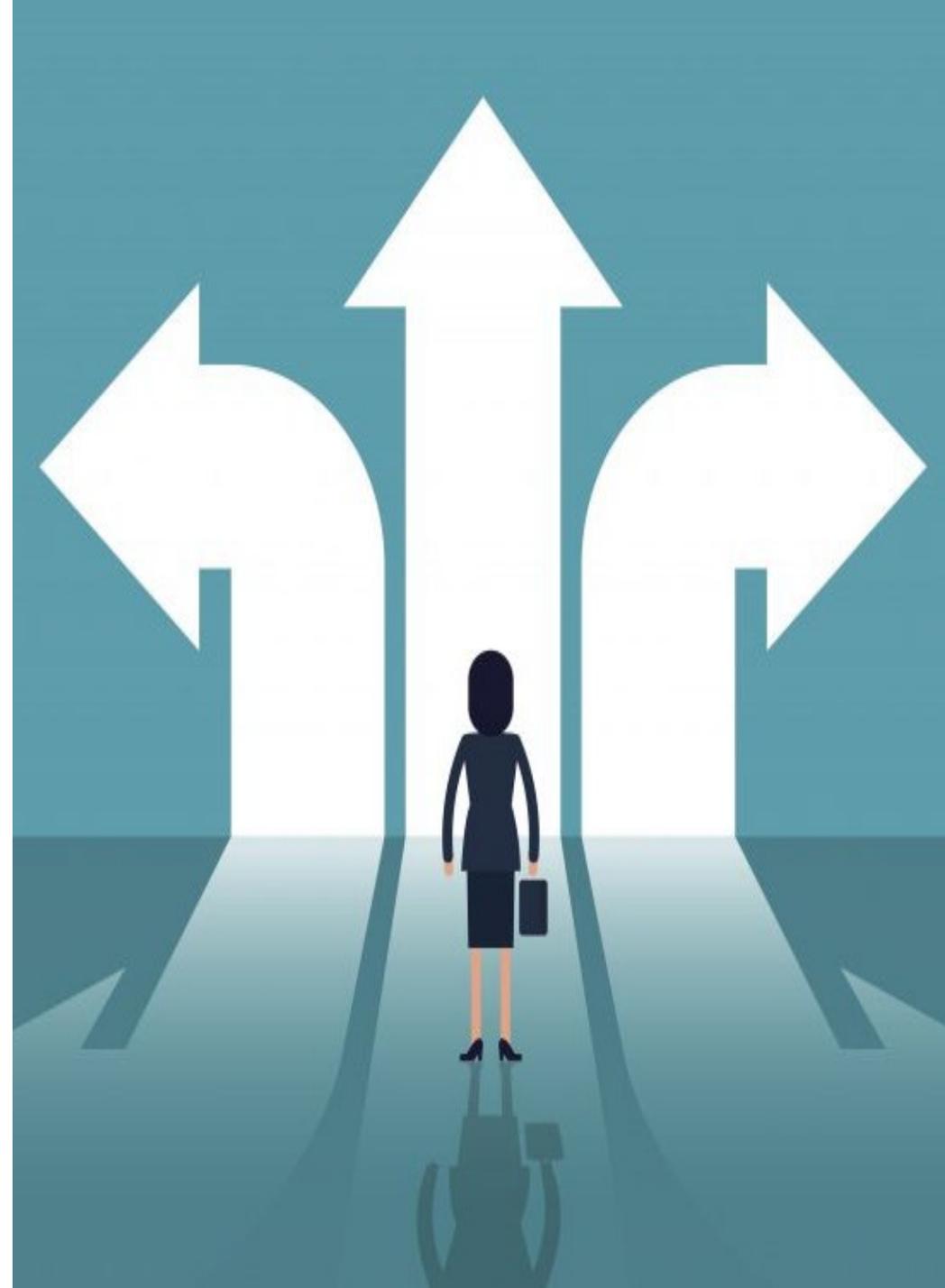
- 1) Individual or collective needs and interests
- 2) Programme delivery or consortium purpose (efficiency or effectiveness)
- 3) Excellence or equity



Realities of decision-making and tensions

- 4) Shared power or greater control of accountability
- 5) Short-term or long-term

Consortia strategies either balance or trade off options



Drivers of tensions and decision-making

- Motivation for establishing the consortium
- Funder expectations
- Interpretation of consortium goals and perception of performance (e.g. research, research capacity, quantifiable outputs)
- Evaluation indicators
- Value systems of partners (individuals and institutions)

Processes, tensions and examples of strategies

Selecting partners

Process and influences

Partner selection criteria

- Pre- existing formal and informal working relationships
- Similar interests
- Level of scientific and managerial capacities
- Past performance of potential partners in previous programmes
- Geographical coverage
- Language considerations
- Recommendations

Tensions

- Ability to perform or greater need (research outputs and/or capacity)
- Scientific or managerial capacity
- Funder or consortium preferences

Efficiency/effectiveness, excellence/equity, short-term/long-term

Examples of strategies

- Performance-driven
- Mix of partners

Determining programme goals and activities

Process and influences

Approaches:

- Top-down
- Bottom-up

Influenced by:

- Programme's strategic areas
- Partners' priorities (strengths and needs)
- Common needs

Tensions

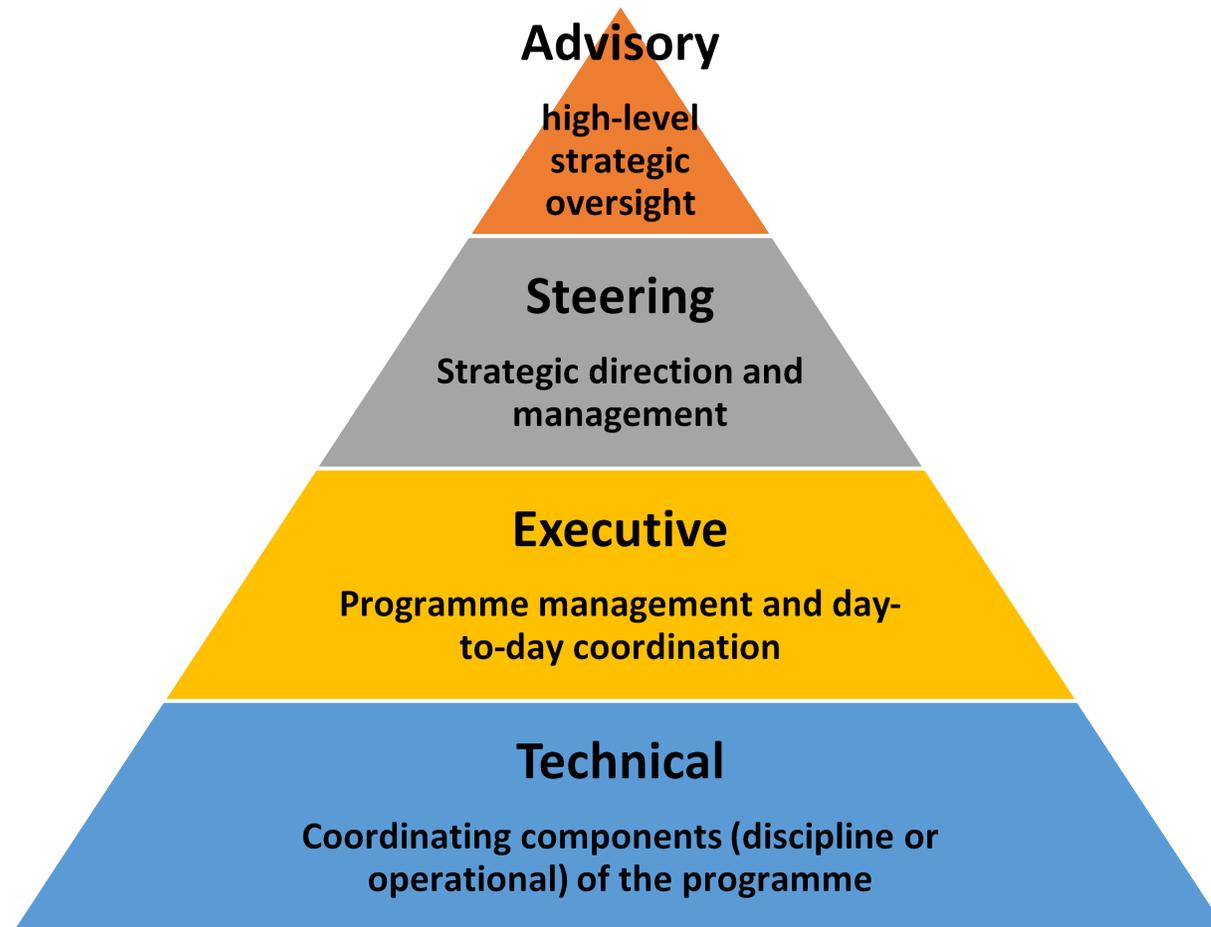
- Programme focus based on output delivery or consortium goals/need (individual/institutional, research/capacity)
- Individual or collective needs
- Short-term or long-term results

Efficiency/effectiveness, short-term/long-term, individual/collective

Examples of strategies

- Focus on researcher training
- Combination of goals (individual and institutional, technical and managerial, short- and long-term)

Governance and management levels



Examples of names used by consortia

- Strategic Advisory Board
- Independent Scientific Advisory Team
- Expert Oversight Advisory Board
- Consortium Advisory Board

- Consortium Steering Committee
- Board of Management
- Executive Committee
- Programme Management Board

- Executive Team
- Secretariat
- Executive Directorate
- Executive Committee

- Sub-committees
- Implementation Teams
- Strategic Hubs
- Operational Teams

Instituting governance structures and processes

Process and influences

Approaches:

- Three or four levels
- Partner representation

Influenced by:

- Collaborative principles – transparency and inclusivity
- Previous experiences
- Funder requirements

Tensions

- Inclusivity or efficient decision-making (e.g. due to size of board)
- Aligning shared power in structure and practice
- Equal power vs accountability

Efficiency/effectiveness, shared power/greater control of accountability

Examples of strategies

- All-inclusive at all levels
- Two-tier structures

Deciding on roles and responsibilities

Process and influences

Approaches:

- Discussions with partners during planning

Influenced by:

- Strength of partners (individual and institutional)
- Funder requirements (e.g. accountability)

Tensions

- Ability to perform or inclusion/learning (strong getting stronger?)

Efficiency/effectiveness, excellence/equity

Examples of strategies

- Strength-based roles
- Wider participation to promote inclusivity and learning

Allocating resources

Process and influences

Approaches:

- Capacity-based distribution
- Equal distribution

Influenced by:

- Ability to perform and use resources
- Need
- Collaborative principles - equity

Tensions

- Existing capability (excellence) or equity
- Producing results in short-term or dealing with learning curve

Examples of strategies

- Merit-based (100% or balanced)
- Quota-based

Managing partners

Process and influences

Approaches:

- Executive-led
- Distributed (partner-led at local levels)

Influenced by:

- Reporting requirements and accountability
- Consortium performance
- Different partner contexts (gaps, bureaucracy)

Tensions

- Efficient management or ownership and learning
- Shared power or greater control of accountability
- Programme outputs or outcomes (short-term or long-term)

Examples of strategies

- Centralised partner management
- Decentralised partner management

How to approach consortium management

PURPOSE & VALUES

- Clarify, rank and agree on consortium goals
- Agree on collaborative principles that will guide operations

STRATEGIES

- Interrogate tensions (challenges) faced and identify options and their consequences
- Vet strategy decisions using primary consortium goals and collaborative principles
- Consider both tangible and intangible elements of management
- Make informed decision

OUTCOME

- Track strategy outcomes and feed back into decisions
- Value and report management-related outcomes and implications

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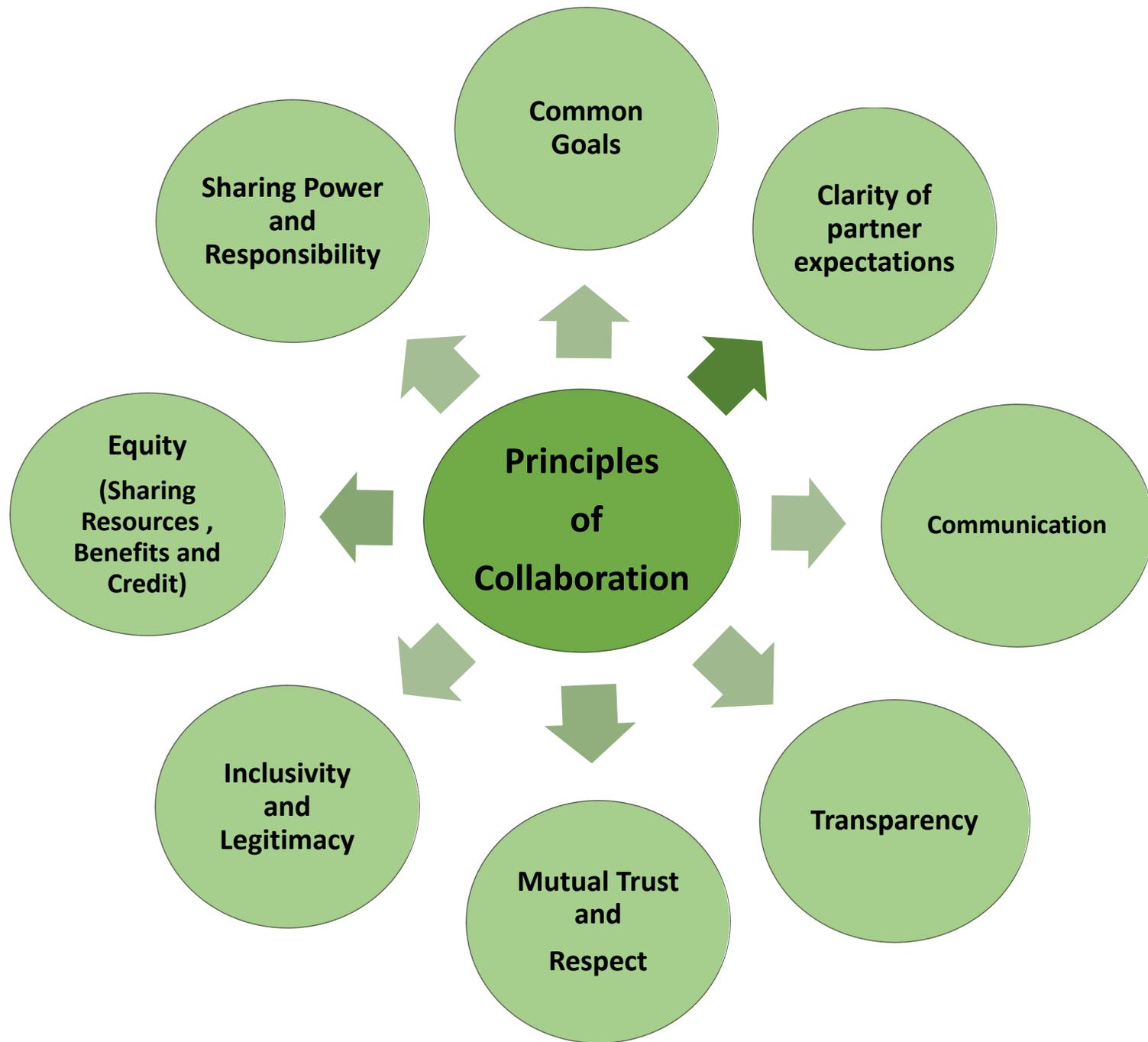
- **Clarify, rank and agree on consortium goals** (research outputs – local use, publications, etc., capacity strengthening, longer term research impact)
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Key points to note:

- There is **no 'one size fits all' formula** for managing consortia as contexts and purposes vary
- **Explicate** and **establish consensus** on purpose and principles/values as they form the basis for consortia decisions
- **Explicitly discuss** strategy options and be aware of **the implications** and **opportunity cost of each decision**
- Consider both **tangible and intangible aspects** of management (e.g., perception of power dynamics, ownership and engagement, and sensitivity to both expressed and unvoiced feedback)
- Track **outcomes of management decisions** and **feed back** into practice and funders to enhance future programmes
- Management is an **integral part of consortia** operations. Capture it in planning and reporting processes and promote knowledge-based practice for better consortia outcomes (e.g., **engage expert** to work through **tailored management plans and strategies at inception**)

Discussion



➤ **Questions arising?**

➤ Examples of challenges and tensions faced?

➤ Additional consortium purpose/goals?

➤ Additional collaborative principles?

➤ Management tips to share?

Useful Resources

- Tagoe, N., S. Molyneux, J. Pulford, V. I. Murunga and S. Kinyanjui (2019). "Managing health research capacity strengthening consortia: a systematised review of the published literature." BMJ Global Health 4(2): e001318. <https://gh.bmj.com/content/4/2/e001318>
- Consortium Alignment Framework for Excellence
<https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/consortium-alignment-framework-for-excellence.pdf>
- KFPE's Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships
https://kfpe.scnat.ch/en/11_principles_7_questions
- Partnership Assessment Tool
<https://www.ccghr.ca/resources/partnerships-and-networking/partnership-assessment-tool/>
- A guide to Effective Collaboration and Learning in Consortia
<https://www.climatecentre.org/downloads/files/Learning%20in%20Consortia%20Guide%20A4%20FINAL%20screen%208.pdf>
- Successful partnerships: A Guide
<https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/36279186.pdf>



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