

Tips on fostering cross-disciplinary research collaborations when not working face-to-face

This bulletin summarises tips on effective virtual collaboration among geographically dispersed researchers which has become an increasing practice due to advances in technology, and reductions in travel whether for climate change reasons or global pandemics to name but a few. These tips are based on seminars organised by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), Interdisciplinary Integration Research Careers Hub (INTEREACH), blog posts on Integration and Implementation Insights (the i2Insights blog), and our own experience.

How we collaborate virtually

- Lead with **compassion** to enable others to feel valued and supported
- Provide **structure** (e.g. clear organograms, standardised procedures, guidelines)
- Provide **clarity** (e.g. responsibilities, do not assume everyone has the same understanding)
- Invest sufficient **time**:
 - Time to respond instead of reacting
 - Time for colleagues/collaborators to work towards milestones
- Use **technology**:
 - For sharing and updating documents (e.g. Microsoft teams, Dropbox)
 - For virtual meetings (e.g. zoom, Microsoft teams, GoToWebinar, skype)
 - For divergent thinking (e.g. Jamboards, post-it, Google Docs, Easy Retro)

How we stay engaged

- Invest extra time to **build relationships**
- **“Buddy up”** and establish smaller working groups
- **Keep the camera on** during virtual meetings

Leading virtual meetings/Presenting on the virtual stage

- Be clear about the meeting/presenting **purpose**
- Drink beforehand and have one at hand
- **Technology** tips:
 - Understand the meeting software and practice beforehand (e.g. video testing, screen sharing)
 - Use video where possible and mute the distractions
 - Set the camera at eye level and make eye contact
- **Design**:
 - Decide ground rules beforehand (e.g. when and through which ways attendees ask questions)
 - Focus on clarity and simplicity
 - Time and pace
 - Use videos and music and be prepared in case things go wrong
 - Use the ‘chat’ function
- **Delivery**:
 - Provide clear, consistent communication about “where to go” virtually and how to join a call
 - Use people’s names for clear communication
 - Check the ‘chat’
 - Project energy (e.g. facilitate while standing up)
 - Keep calm and carry on (technology could go wrong!)
 - Practise makes perfect

References

- Collaborating virtually through disruption – [Link](#)
Tips for improving virtual meetings – [Link](#)
Applying human-centered design to virtual conference planning – [Link](#)
Presenting on the virtual stage – [Link](#)