Leading Large Social-Ecological Projects

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MISTAKES
It could be that the purpose of your life is only to serve as a warning to others.
LEADING LARGE TRANSDISCIPLINARY PROJECTS ADDRESSING SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS:
A Primer for Project Directors
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https://nifa.usda.gov/leading-transdisciplinary-projects
Career Status if You’re Considering Taking the Plunge

• Do you have sufficient seniority in your organization?
• Do you have an established network of colleagues?
• Do you have “broad shoulders”?
Personal Qualities of a High-Functioning Director

• Are you able to earn the respect of team members of varying professional levels, disciplines, backgrounds, and interests?
• Can you work with transparency?
• Are you flexible in your ideas and methods?
• Do you find humor in your mistakes?
• Do you have a thick skin to withstand criticism?
• Can you accept successes and praise with humility?
  • “take the blame for failures and distribute the credit for successes”
Skills of a High-Functioning Director

• Do you demonstrate leadership?
• Are you **knowledgeable** about the project as a whole, both within and outside your own discipline?
• Do you have a **respectful attitude** toward each project participant’s contributions?
• Are you able to represent the project and its participants through effective **communication skills**?
• Are you prepared to be decisive, fair, consistent, and generous in your decisions, time, and knowledge?
Key Project Design and Management Elements

• Design a project structure with clear lines of reporting and responsibility
  • Consider forming an executive team to guide high-level project functioning
  • Understand and plan for necessary changes in structure to adapt to changing conditions

• Budget for and hire a full-time project manager

• Create realistic timelines with multiple milestones to facilitate annual evaluation and assessment
  • Communicate these to the team often

• Work with experts to design and carry out a data management plan

• Take advantage of institutional resources to assist with proposal preparation and reverse site visits
  • Cue Sobha Jaishankar, UF Office of Research
Creating a Culture of Collaboration

• Model collaborative behaviors – open dialogue, exchanging information, sharing data, building trust
• Allow time for a shared commitment and language to emerge
• Allocate $ and time to allow the team to meet on both regular and ad hoc bases
• Plan strategic activities that accomplish everyday tasks as well as the big picture vision of the project
• Consider formalizing your culture of collaboration in a document
  • Credit attribution, data sharing, how major decisions are made
Enabling Participant Success

- Project success is not possible without individual success
- Set and communicate clear expectations for performance
- Establish mechanisms to recognize and reward achievement
  - Financial resources, authorship, responsibility, public recognition, opportunities for professional growth
- Help participants understand the costs and rewards of large project “transaction costs”, and mitigate those costs when possible
- Whenever possible, align project goals and tasks with individual rewards
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