

Summary for Policy Makers

U.S.-EU Research Cooperation Stakeholders Roundtable

September 19, 2012

A roundtable meeting organized under the auspices of the Link2US and BILAT-USA projects¹ and hosted by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in Washington, DC, USA, on September 19, 2012.

About the roundtable

Trans-Atlantic research cooperation has historically been diverse and abundant, with many existing relationships and linkages between U.S. and European researchers and institutions. In addition, there are over twenty formal, government-to-government science and technology agreements between the United States and various European countries and the European Union (EU) along with countless implementing arrangements between various government agencies and departments. Yet there are new opportunities and mechanisms for cooperation (e.g., upcoming Horizon 2020 program of the EU; more dynamic intra-European coordination of national research activities; launch of the Global Research Council), stronger needs for cooperation to address more complex or transnational issues, and increasing pressure to share resources due to national budget constraints. Enhancing Trans-Atlantic cooperation in the twenty-first century means taking a multi-sectoral approach involving the diverse stakeholders in the research community -- academia to industry, researchers to program managers, and funding agencies to professional scientific societies -- and developing “strategic bottom-up” approaches in which the myriad cooperation efforts at the researcher and institution level can help support a strategic Trans-Atlantic relationship. This requires building upon the best of the existing relationships, developing novel mechanisms and structures that take advantage of the new Trans-Atlantic features but complement existing efforts, and overcoming unproductive yet ossified practices. Moreover, these new developments between the United States and Europe could be examples for greater and more productive cooperation at the global level and between other regions.

Given this context, the Link2US and BILAT-USA projects convened a day-long, not-for-attribution meeting that brought together over 40 experts from the United States and Europe to share experiences focused on a number of key issues in Trans-Atlantic research cooperation that cut across

¹ The Link2US and BILAT-USA projects are co-funded by the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (Capacities Programme on International Cooperation under grant agreement numbers 244371 and 244434) and, since 2009, have identified various issues to address in order to enhance U.S.-EU research cooperation, ranging from policy coordination needs to capacity building for grant administration. The projects conclude in September 2012 and a follow-up BILAT-USA project will commence in the autumn to further advance these efforts. The roundtable serves as a bookend to the projects with the goal of motivating and identifying gaps and areas for action going forward, particularly those areas that require the involvement of the entire scientific community from funders to scientists.

scientific disciplines and research themes while bridging the gap between official government dialogues and institutional- or researcher-level interactions. The roundtable addressed three areas:

1. Incentives for cooperation that strengthen the relationship of researchers and institutions;
2. Cooperation mechanisms without transnational funding; and
3. Complexities of administering and managing diverse and international funding sources.

Participants included university and research institution administrators, scientific society and association leaders, government science policy advisers, and funding agency representatives. They sought to identify needs and gaps and highlight approaches to these issues from broad stakeholder perspectives and provide directions for future work by on-going and future U.S.-EU cooperation efforts.

The summary below relates lessons shared and potential action steps for each of the topics. These are highlights of the discussion, and they are not necessarily consensus views of roundtable participants.

Incentives for cooperation that strengthen the relationship of researchers and institutions

Cooperative research funding may attract researchers, but it is expensive and can be legally and administratively complicated. Yet there are non-research funding mechanisms to encourage and facilitate cooperation that strengthen the relationships between researchers and between institutions. There is much formal support for awareness-raising activities of funding programs (e.g., efforts by overseas missions of research funders) and mobility programs for doctoral students and faculty (e.g., fellowships, traineeships, etc.). What are other mechanisms to incentivize research cooperation, particularly those that support a more strategic approach to cooperation? How have efforts like bi-lateral/multi-lateral research workshops and taskforces been effective or not? And what are roles for funders, professional organizations like scientific/research societies, and international research companies?

- Approaches to incentivizing cooperation should be based on the objectives of such cooperation. It may be coordinating strategies for a specific scientific field, where the scientists are already aware of each other; or developing new connections and networks, especially in multi- or inter-disciplinary areas where the scientists do not already know each other and the role of funding agency program officers are important; or addressing a global/regional challenge, where the involvement of both policy makers and scientists is essential. The objective also informs whether a more “top-down” or more “bottom-up” approach should be taken.
- Official government-led taskforces and working groups, such as the U.S.-EU Taskforce on Biotechnology Research and the technical working groups of the U.S.-EU Energy Council, are often initiated at the high political level to support broad foreign policy objectives. Nevertheless, the success of these types of “top-down” mechanisms depends on the incorporation of scientific

leadership at the operational level. For example, respected researchers in their field chair or co-lead the operational working groups. These taskforces can serve usefully as think tanks, which set priority areas of research support.

- In addition to leadership by the research community in taskforces and working groups, participation by the researchers is equally important. Taskforces can hold research workshops and “blue sky” forums (e.g., similar to Gordon Research Conferences), support short-term visits and exchanges, and organize training courses. In some cases, there is a challenge of involving researchers, especially government-employed ones, where national budget limitations have restricted travel. Web-based meetings and other virtual mechanisms have been utilized and may need to be further exploited, taking into consideration their own limitations and disadvantages compared to physical presence.
- As bilateral and other international mechanisms proliferate, it is important to be aware of other each other to avoid too much overlap.
- Involvement of universities and industry, especially as both sectors are actively engaged with their own cooperative efforts, in either the research agenda-setting or target-setting (to address a challenge) activities is necessary. Professional scientific societies, where there can be involvement of an international mix of industrial as well as academic scientists and students, have and can provide a platform for exploring future research agendas and involving other stakeholders like the research funding agencies.
- To address new, multi- or inter-disciplinary areas of research, researchers from different fields, importantly mixing senior researchers with early-career researchers, need to be pro-actively brought together (e.g., in bilateral workshops and conferences) with the help of funding agencies or other overarching scientific organizations such as academies of science. These activities are necessary to break national disciplinary boundaries and to build new networks, not necessarily to directly initiate joint projects. A particular challenge is the task-intensive nature of organizing such activities on program staff, who need to identify participants from a diverse group of researchers.
- It is difficult to incentivize networking without the potential for funding, even if limited and small-scale.
- Many researchers already think globally but are constrained by domestic considerations (e.g., funding constraints, university tenure policies, etc.), so there is a need to foster their ability to act globally as well.
- Research cooperation requires commitment at the political, programmatic, and research levels. In particular for cooperation to proceed operationally, program officers at funding agencies and researchers need to be in agreement.

Cooperation mechanisms without transnational funding

Transnational research funding is a small part of a country's total research funding and it is also a contentious mode of funding that is particularly subject to domestic political-economic and legal considerations. Many international research cooperation funding mechanisms do not rely on monies exchanged between countries. What are the most urgent challenges and needs in implementing these mechanisms? What are ones that can be catalyzed from the bottom-up or support open collaboration models while still responding to strategic priorities?

- Coordinated and joint calls require detailed consideration of the administrative and procedural norms of each funding agency (e.g., timing of when solicitations are sent and when proposals are reviewed). Moreover, uncertainty over national budgets exacerbates these challenges.
- The support of funding agency leaders is essential in coordinated or joint funding programs to adapt administrative and procedure norms if necessary (e.g., finding legal options).
- Effective cooperative mechanisms can rely on existing funding mechanisms that already have a degree of flexibility and not necessarily dedicated to a particular cooperative relationship.
- Cooperating funding agencies must have a level of trust between each other and an intimate understanding of each other's practices. To build trust, there is a need to have agreement on higher principles underlying grant funding, including peer review (e.g., efforts by the Global Research Council).
- "Double jeopardy," where a cooperative effort requires approval by both funders in a bilateral relationship, can be an issue but not always. Where proposals are not joint but coordinated, scientists can tailor their proposals to their own national funders requirements and priorities. "Double jeopardy" can also be minimized if one funder accepts the review of another funder or a common peer-review is utilized for cooperative proposals even when not funding from a single pot.
- Multilateral, non-single-pot, examples exist (e.g., G-8 HORC's and IUPAC initiatives/calls), but experience is still limited with these mechanisms.
- Ultimately, awards need to be flexible for researchers to use.

Complexities of administering and managing diverse and international funding sources

Even with strong political support for research in the United States and Europe, access to funding remains a challenging feature of academic life. Researchers and their institutions look far and wide for funding sources, and this increasingly includes transnational sources. Increasing international research collaborations accentuates this expansion. Like-wise, some funding agencies are also increasingly promoting and supporting transnational funding as part of encouraging international cooperation. Researchers and their institutions need to handle the administration challenges resulting from the growing diversity of funding sources as efficiently and effectively as possible. Which grants

policies can most benefit from greater coherence in reducing administrative burden and ensuring compliance from the Trans-Atlantic perspective? What kinds of support are needed for researchers and their institutions to handle diverse sources of funding? How should administration and compliance considerations shape the development of cooperative funding mechanisms?

- Funding source diversity presents administration challenges but provides a level of funding stability to an institution.
- Important to distinguish between necessary and proper grant stewardship from unnecessary and ill-conceived policies leading to administrative and compliance burden.
- Three approaches to addressing administration issues at the international level that are necessary yet at times in conflict: *simplification* of rules and policies; *policy coherence* between different countries or funding agencies (e.g., accepting national laws governing the institution to take place of national law governing the funding agency); and *differentiation* of rules with accountability dependent upon the sector, type of research, or partner country/funding agency (e.g., degree of risk of the research project, confidence or equivalence in national systems, etc.). For example, whereas a research institution may desire simplification of reporting such that the requirements are the same from institution to institution, the same institution may prefer differentiation for indirect cost calculations that can vary from institution to institution. Moreover, in shaping funding programs and grants policies, even though attempts are made at times to simplify the process for participants (i.e., the principle investigator), which is desirable, much of the burden still falls on grants administrators.
- In working with foreign funding agencies, many institutions have limited capacities to handle administration of these foreign awards. A single individual may be responsible for the entire institution. At other times, a principal investigator may be given administration compliance responsibility. In either case, grant stewardship risks excessive compromise. Both decreasing the unnecessary administrative requirements and increasing the institutional capacity to handle the varied funding sources are necessary.
- Formal capacity training by funding agencies on post-award grant administration is beneficial. Examples include providing on-line tools in multiple languages, regional training seminars of administration staff, and administration infrastructure support.
- Unofficial capacity building, such as ad-hoc grants management networks, that address pragmatic and day-to-day issues can also be helpful, particularly between institutions reliant on single grant officers.
- Some funding agencies are exploring an anchoring concept for institution/principle investigator identification where a single identification, and its concomitant organizational/investigator data, can be used for multiple funding agencies.
- Numerous areas were cited as examples for further simplification, coherence or differentiation, including research ethics (e.g., human subject ethical reviews and IRB requirements), currency exchange rates, indirect costs, cultural differences (e.g., need to sign a contract), intellectual

property issues (e.g., differences between U.S. and Europe on grace period for publication), accounting practices, reporting requirements, etc.

Recommendations for action

- There should be mechanisms to bring together multi-level or multi-sectoral stakeholders to address research cooperation. For the former, this involves the program officers at funding agencies and researchers. For the latter, this involves the industrial, academic, and government sectors (e.g., the use of roundtables like the U.S. National Academies Government-University-Industry Research Roundtable (GUIRR) model at the international level).
- Capacity training and support for post-award grant administration should be further enhanced, either at the formal level by funding agencies or at the unofficial level, such as ad-hoc grants management networks.
- A systematic means for identifying the priority areas where grants policies can be better aligned and how they can be practically addressed would be beneficial. One idea is a Trans-Atlantic committee of grants administrators to make recommendations and provide templates for collaborations.

Disclaimer

The summary provides highlights of the main discussion points of the meeting; it is neither a consensus view of the participants nor does it necessarily represent the views of the Link2US and BILAT-USA project partners or the author (AAAS).