



National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

AAAS Workshop on Responsible Professional Practices in a Changing Research Environment

# Collaborative International Research – Planning to Avoid Pitfalls

February 14, 2013  
Boston, MA



NIH/IAID



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
National Institutes of Health

**F. Gray Handley**

Associate Director for International Research Affairs  
Office of the Director

# Outline



- **Context** – presentation perspective
- **Principles and Factors** – influencing international collaboration success
- **Challenges** – limiting success
- **Strategies** – underlying success
- **Pitfalls** – only some avoidable
- **Planning** – pitfall prevention or response

# Context - Personal



- Health Diplomacy; International Research and Service Delivery Program Management
- Policy, Planning, and Oversight
- U.S. Government and Multilateral Agency Perspective
  - DHHS – NIH, CDC, OS
  - State Department
  - U.S. Overseas Missions
  - USAID
  - OMB
  - DoD
- Not Academic Institution or NGO Perspective

# Context – Institutional



- **NIH/NIAID: Large public institution with clear mandate**
  - Pursuit of knowledge to improve health through basic, clinical and translational health research
  - Respond to health threats
  - Supports domestic and international academic and government scientists through merit-based awards to institutions
  - Facilitate communication to advance science and public understanding
  - \$30B/year budget (NIAID - \$4.5B)

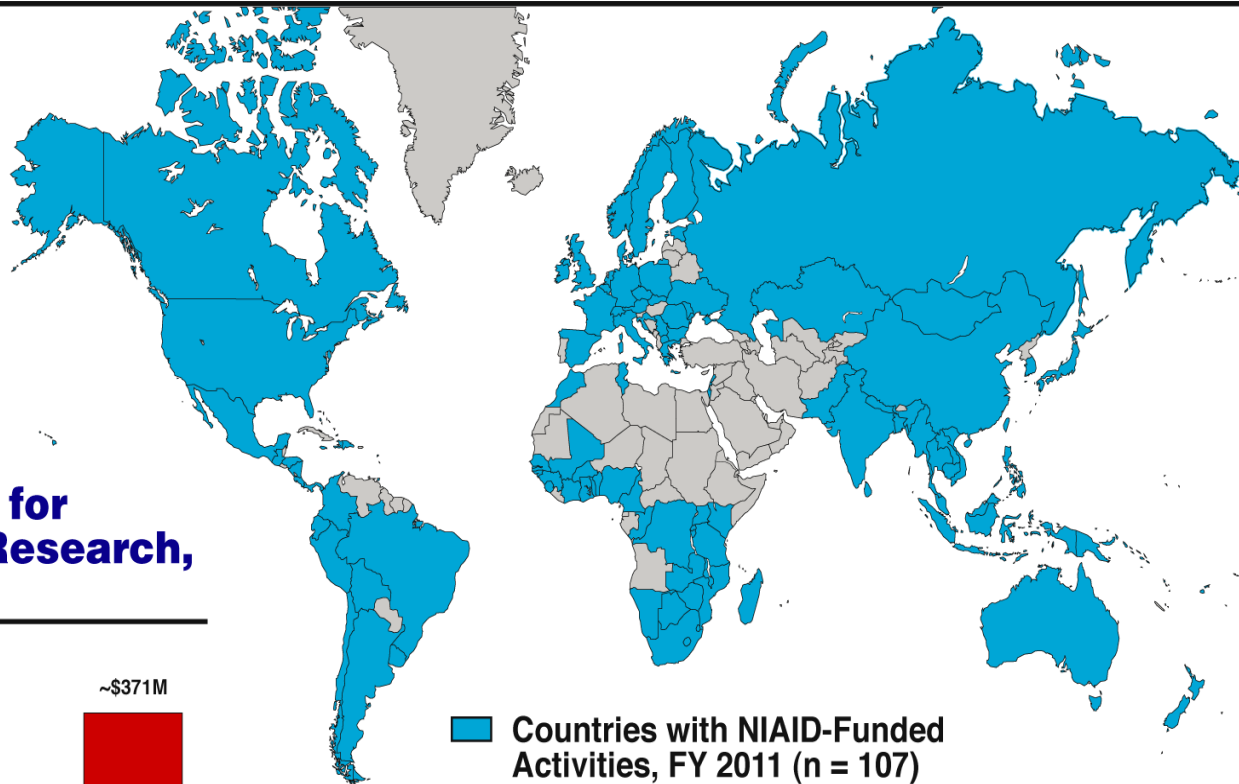
# Collaborative Global Health Research



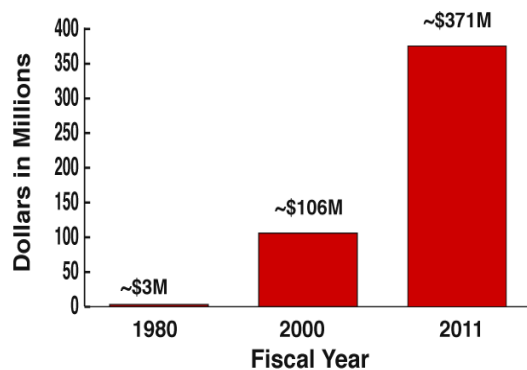
Courtesy of Anthony S. Fauci/NIAID

NIAID

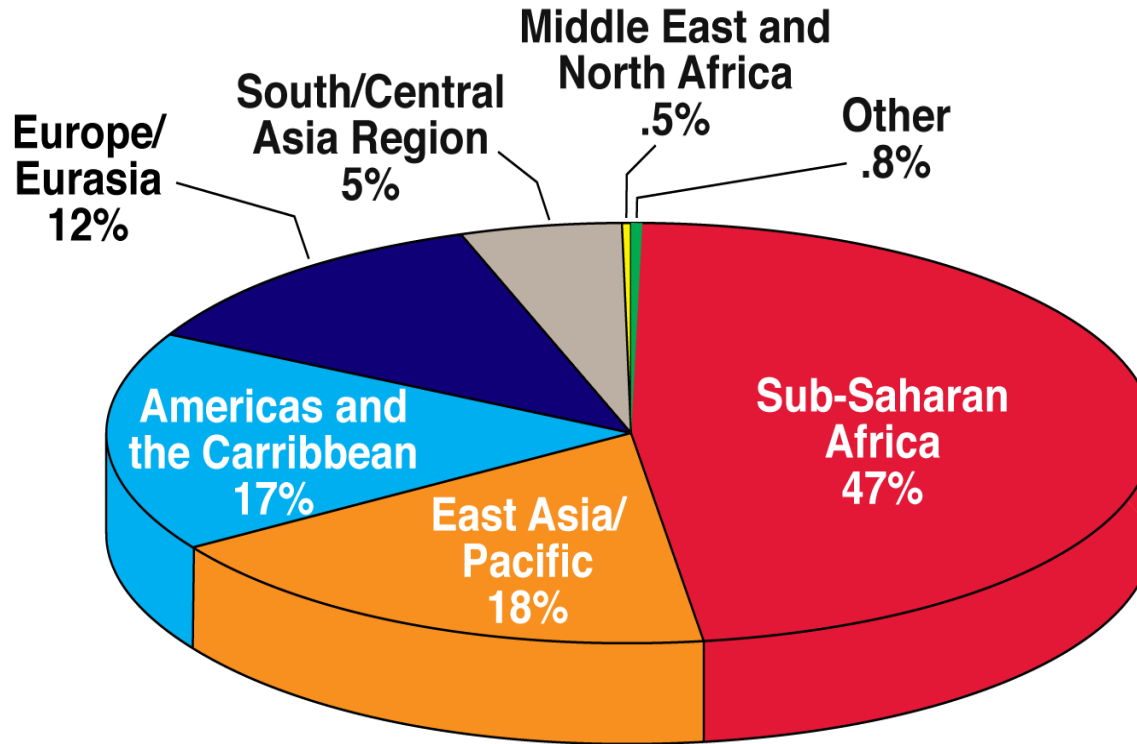
# NIAID Global Health Research



## NIAID Funding for International Research, 1980-2011



# NIAID International Funding, FY 2011



**Total: \$371.2 Million**

# Principles Underlying International Research Success



- **Collaboration focus should address missions of partner institutions**
- **Scientific focus should relate to investigators' shared interests and respond to local priorities**
- **Collaborators, institutions, research participants/communities should derive benefits**
- **Research should be informed by best available information and shared understanding of the field**
- **Result should have potential to be “significant”**
- **Research meets highest possible ethical and regulatory standards**



# Factors that Influence International Research Success



- **Shared scientific interests and objectives**
- **Clear and mutual benefits to researchers, mentors, and their institutions**
- **Host government support**
- **Community involvement**
- **Trust among the research team and involved institutions**
- **Investment in capacity**
- **Commitment to sustainability**

# Challenges that Limit International Research Success



- Intense time commitment
- Expensive and difficult to maintain over time – facilities and relationships
- Balancing focus when there are demands outside the core mandate/purpose
- Effective communications – technical, cultural, temporal and linguistic
- Meeting unrelated institutional objectives and academic requirements
- Domestic vs. international perceived dichotomy
- Ineffective problem solving
- Bureaucracy, delay, corruption

# Strategies that foster International Research Success



- **Conscientiously seek support at all levels**
  - **government, community, professional associations, institution**
- **Develop local leadership**
- **Know your colleague's "context"**
- **Collaborate with multiple stakeholders**
- **Invest in capacity enhancement**
  - **human capacity – training**
  - **institutional capacity – often requires partners**
- **Commit to long-term investment of time and resources**
- **Access complementary resources and expertise**

# International Research Collaboration Pitfalls and Responses



- Only some can be avoided
- Vary depending on type of research: basic vs. clinical vs. translational
- Change over time
- Addressed in three ways:
  - **Establish a strong foundation**
  - **Thorough contextual analysis**
  - **Careful planning**



## Key Pitfalls – Internal

- Either partner too busy to meet commitments
- Unusual demands on scientists – operational challenges
- Sharing of data and biological material
- Weak science management – SOPs and fiduciary
- Language and comprehension
- Staff incompetence
- Poor exit strategy – can “poison the well” for future



## Key Pitfalls - External

- Surprises – staff or space loss; unexpected demands; government instability
- Delays – sometimes mysterious
- Outright graft – dangerous on many levels
- Legal and regulatory delays/uncertainties
- Bad press – especially with clinical research
- Unreliable utilities – threat to research output/quality

# Addressing Pitfalls:

## I. Establish a Strong Foundation

- Find a partner you can trust, respect...and talk to
- Understand your partner's personal and professional needs, capabilities, expectations
- Share your needs and expectations directly
- Ensure partner or has ability to resolve issues or add to team someone who can
- Assess level of institutional support
- Make mutual commitment to rigorous planning and joint management



# Addressing Pitfalls:

## II. Thorough Contextual Analysis



- Understand foreign partner's context
  - invest in a thorough situational analysis
  - culture, competencies, governance, regulatory
- Understand funding organization
  - policies, procedures and expectations
- Understand partner organization
  - identify supportive leadership
  - administrative and fiduciary management capacity
  - open to transparency and foreign cooperation
- Identify potential allies and assistors



# Addressing Pitfalls:

## III. Careful Planning



1. Describe all partners' responsibilities and anticipated benefits
2. Strategy to identify and engage allies
3. Analysis of legal and regulatory needs/obligations
4. Scientific and financial monitoring plan, including accountability and repercussions
5. Plan to meet technical, logistic and personnel requirements
6. Internal and external communications plan
7. "End-of-Project" plan



**Thank You**

Best wishes for success in your  
international collaborations

*handleygr@niaid.nih.gov*

NIH  
NIAMD