



Equitable Research Partnerships Toolkit

Tool 2: Recognising and Assessing Assumptions

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All of us make assumptions that are informed by past experiences and exposures. Researchers are no different. Their disciplines, locations and traditions, can all shape their outlook on how research should be conducted, the different roles people can and should play, and what equity might look like within a partnership. Every researcher is unique and will inevitably hold a different set of assumptions to others in a research partnership. Recognising and Assessing Assumptions is a dialogue-based tool, designed to make assumptions explicit, and increase awareness about how these might influence equity.

Why use the Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool?

The Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool addresses equity by:

1. Making explicit the different assumptions held by members of a partnership.
2. Creating a space to think about the equity implications of any assumptions brought to a partnership.

When to use the Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool?

Phase	Rating	Descriptions
Planning	•••	Ideally the Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool will be implemented in the planning stage of a research partnership.
Implementing	•	The tool can be adapted to focus on assumptions related to the implementing stage.
Disseminating	•	The tool can be adapted to focus on assumptions related to the disseminating stage.
Sustaining	•••	Recognising and Assessing Assumptions could be implemented as an evaluation tool, or to think about the implications of assumptions while sustaining a research partnership.

Ratings

••• Designed for this stage | •• Can be used as is in this stage | • Can be adapted for use in this stage



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How long does it take to use the Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool?

Rapid approach

To rapidly implement this approach, each participant would need to spend about ten minutes preparing for a one-hour group meeting.

Intensive approach

A more intensive approach to recognising and assessing assumptions could be implemented through a group meeting or workshop of around two to three hours.

What other resources do you need to use the Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool?

A facilitator is required for the group session. It may be an independent facilitator or a member of the participant group.

For face-to-face implementation:

- A space for meeting, stationery (e.g. poster paper, pens, markers).
- Projection facility for displaying the [Assumptions Assessment Matrix template](#).

For virtual implementation:

- A virtual meeting platform with screen sharing and breakout room facilities.
- A virtual whiteboard app such as [Miro](#).

How to use the Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool?

The Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool is designed to be implemented in a group setting, which could be face-to-face or virtual.



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Rapid approach

In advance of the meeting:

1. Ask each participant to contribute up to five assumptions. If you believe some of the assumptions will be sensitive to discuss, you could allow participants to submit assumptions anonymously. Possible methods for submitting assumptions include:
 1. By adding to a shared drive spreadsheet or document
 2. By emailing to the facilitator to compile
 3. By writing on a list (only possible if participants are in the same physical space).
2. Alternatively, you could choose assumptions from those suggested below.

In the meeting:

3. Select three to five assumptions to explore in more depth. These could be selected by the participants through a vote, chosen from a hat, or determined by the facilitator.
4. Split participants into three to five groups (face-to-face) or breakout rooms (virtual), one per assumption. Ask each group to spend 15-20 minutes discussing the following questions and recording key answers on a poster paper (face-to-face) or virtual whiteboard (virtual):
 1. Is the assumption justified?
 2. How could the assumption influence equity in our partnership?
 3. How should this assumption be addressed in our partnership?
5. Call all participants back to one group and ask one member of each small group to present a summary of their group's discussion. Give them three to five minutes for this.
6. Optional step - Ask members of the group to nominate themselves to act on the ideas presented for addressing each of the assumptions.
7. Close the session by reminding participants that all people hold assumptions, and that to build an equitable partnership it is necessary for all members to regularly reflect on the implications of their assumptions.



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Intensive approach

1. Open the session by asking participants to brainstorm assumptions that researchers bring to research partnerships (15-20 minutes).
 1. Ask participants to call out assumptions.
 2. Ask small groups to develop lists of assumptions.
 3. Ask participants to write assumptions on sticky notes (or type them in the chat, if implementing virtually).
2. Select three to five assumptions, that are relevant to your research partnership, to explore in more depth. These could be selected by the participants through a vote, chosen from a hat, or determined by the facilitator. Type the assumptions into the spaces in the [Assessment Matrix template](#).
3. For each selected assumption, ask participants to indicate if the assumption is:
 - a. Justified and fair
 - b. Justified but not fair
 - c. Fair but not justified
 - d. Neither justified nor fair

You achieve this by conducting an online or in-person poll or by asking participants to move to corners of the room that are labelled with options a-d from step 3.

4. For each assumption, ask several participants:
 1. To speak about why they think the way they do.
 2. To indicate how this assumption will influence equity in the partnership.
 3. To indicate how this assumption could be addressed within the partnership.
5. Complete the checking your assumptions matrix by
 1. Entering the number of participants who chose to stand by each option (a-d from step 3), representing their assessment of the assumption.
 2. Listing ways in which the assumption will influence equity.
 3. Listing strategies or actions by which this assumption could be addressed to enhance equity.



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Suggested assumptions to explore when using the Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool:

1. Research partnerships are intended to build the capacity of researchers in the Global South.
2. Research institutions in the Global South have lower research costs than research institutions in the Global North.
3. It's a privilege for research institutions in the Global South to conduct research in partnership with research institutions in the Global North.
4. Research institutions in the Global South should take greater responsibility for data collection because they are closer to the research setting.
5. Research institutions in the Global North will design a study before initiating partnerships with research institutions in the Global South.
6. Researchers in the Global South deserve to be the first and/or last authors of articles reporting the results of partnership research conducted in their countries.
7. Researchers in the Global South are generally less skilled than researchers in the Global North.
8. Researchers in the Global South find it harder to get funding because they have less research experience than their peers in the Global North.
9. Peer-reviewed publications are the most important outputs of a research partnership.
10. Research does not need to be relevant to the local community, so long as it advances scientific knowledge.

Tips for using the Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool

- Focus on assumptions, not the individuals that hold them. This should help in to keep the discussion(s) non-personal.
- Make it clear that participants can suggest assumptions that other people hold, not only assumptions that they hold themselves.

Expected outputs and outcomes from using the Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool

Outputs

- Intensive implementation of this tool will produce an Assumptions Assessment Matrix. This will detail strategies that might be implemented within the partnership to address assumptions that influence equity.



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Outcomes

Using this tool will:

- Increase awareness about the assumptions that researchers may bring to a partnership.
- Foster understanding about how assumptions can influence equity in a partnership.
- Encourage researchers to regularly reflect on the implications of their assumptions.

Completed example of the Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool

This [completed example](#) includes five assumptions, as discussed by a hypothetical partnership, involving five European, and five African partners. The results show that partners often had different perspectives about whether assumptions were justified and/or fair.

References and further reading for the Recognising and Assessing Assumptions tool

- This tool is informed by the checking your assumptions activity in: Cornish Hilary, Jude Fransman and Kate Newman. 2017. "Rethinking research partnerships: Discussion guide and toolkit." Available from: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-08/discussion-guide-ngo-academic-research-oct2017.pdf>