Framework for third-party cooperation

Background

World-class scientific research with scientific and societal impact is NWO's mission. In doing so, NWO collaborates with third parties and deliberately encourages this in multiple programs. Collaboration contributes to the formulation of new research questions, the conduct of research, and the application and transfer of newly generated knowledge.

NWO fulfills three roles to guarantee quality and innovation in science and promotes impact of research. As a connector, we perform an important bridging function between researchers, governments, politics, knowledge institutions, industry and other knowledge users. As a financier (NWO-D), we stimulate research. And at our research institutes (NWO-I), scientists conduct research. Each institute has its own scientific mission of (inter)national strategic importance. For all these roles of NWO, cooperation with third parties is essential.

As an independent science funder, NWO does not exclude specific parties from collaboration in advance. At program and project level, NWO's goal is to finance research with the greatest possible scientific and socially desirable impact on people, planet and society for now and the future.

Objective

With this framework NWO aims to ensure that academic freedom and integrity are respected in collaborations and that each potential collaboration is carefully considered and assessed. It is essential that, should the collaboration go ahead, clear agreements are established to safeguard the preconditions. The framework can be used both in advance and during the project or program.

Users

This framework has been prepared primarily for assessing NWO research collaborations with third parties, i.e. joint research projects or programs in which NWO or an NWO institute is one of the parties. The framework, or parts of it, may also serve as guidance for assessing:

1. Collaborations within projects in which NWO is not a party (NWO-funded);
2. Collaborations during meetings such as events and conferences.

The document publicly available and serves to raise awareness and act as an action perspective when evaluating collaboration opportunities; it also serves as a starting point to discuss potential collaborations with third parties.
Weighing Framework

The framework consists of the Considerations and Preconditions sections, with both sections to be gone through to form an overall picture of the value of collaboration. The considerations are formulated in the form of questions and have an open character, stimulating and explaining the conversation about (possible) pros and cons. The preconditions are binding principles that must be met.

1. Considerations

1.1. Strategic consideration
   - Does the collaboration fit with the mission and strategy of NWO and its divisions?
   - Is there enough support within the relevant organizational unit of NWO to enter into the collaboration?

1.2. Social and scientific impact
   - What is the potential added value of the collaboration; what are the potential desired and undesired consequences of the collaboration with respect to scientific and/or societal impact? To evaluate potential societal impact, the definition of societal impact used by NWO for applicants can be used.
   - Can there be dual use of research results and what applications are conceivable?

2. Preconditions

2.1. Standard NWO conditions for scientific research
   - The collaboration is in line with the Dutch Code of Conduct for Scientific Integrity.
   - Independence and impartiality are guaranteed in the design and conduct of and reporting on the research.
   - The collaboration is in line with NWO policy on knowledge security.
   - The cooperation agreement is in line with the standard NWO conditions regarding intellectual property, free publication, etc. (link to agreements).
   - NWO's Open Science conditions are met.
   - Check for a Memorandum of Understanding to be submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹
   - Cooperation is in line with international sanctions laws.

2.2. Additional conditions
   - An exit clause is included in the agreement between NWO and the third party, from the consideration that there are, by definition, risks associated with collaborating with a third party. Depending on the nature of the collaboration and the collaboration partner (and thus the assessment of the risks), the grounds for dissolution of the collaboration can be formulated more or less stringently.
   - Both parties are transparent about the cooperation towards the outside world. There are agreements on how NWO and third party communicate about the collaboration.

---

¹ Under the “Regulatory Designation” for international agreements.