

STUDENT PARTNERS PROGRAM GUIDEBOOK

Original version prepared by

Robert Cockcroft, Taylor Drouillard, Jennifer Faubert, Danielle Gabay, Kris Knorr,

Alexandra Liu, Beth Marquis, Ana Qarri, Rafal Shammass,

Marie Vander Kloet, and Greg Van Gastel



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GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

Congratulations and welcome to partners in the MacPherson Institute Student Partners Program (SPP)! Within this document, you will find information for both students and staff/faculty members, including guidelines, procedures, tips and suggestions of relevance to student-faculty/staff partnership within the SPP.

Program Overview and Historical Context

In 2013-2014, the Arts & Science Program and the MacPherson Institute (then known as MIETL) collaborated to create "Student Partner" positions for students who are interested in pedagogical research and innovation. Building on current scholarship (see Appendix 1 for further details), the goal of this program is to establish meaningful partnerships between students and staff/faculty working on teaching and learning projects at McMaster, in order to enhance the quality of the work conducted, provide further opportunities for student engagement, and generate significant learning opportunities for everyone involved.

Since the Program's inception, a wide range of Student Partners have contributed to the enhancement of teaching and learning at McMaster by participating in projects through the SPP. Members of the Student Partners team have contributed to the design and development of courses and curricula, helped to create resources for staff/faculty and students, and collaborated with faculty and staff partners on research projects related to teaching and learning. Several have also co-authored research articles and conference presentations, co-facilitated events like our International Institute on Student-Staff Partnerships, or worked as student reviewers or editors for the *International Journal for Students as Partners*, a new peer-reviewed journal which is hosted at McMaster (<https://mulpress.mcmaster.ca/ijsap>). In total, more than 280 undergraduate and graduate students from across campus have participated in the program since it began.

What does a Student Partner position entail?

These positions provide opportunities for students and faculty/staff to collaborate on teaching and learning projects, across one or more academic terms. The specific number of hours students spend participating will vary from project to project, but most involve something in the range of 50 hours over a term. Students will typically apply to join particular project teams (though they may also submit projects in partnership with faculty/staff), and will fulfill a variety of roles depending on the project and its goals, as well as the goals of the people involved. In all cases, the aim is for students to work in meaningful collaboration with faculty/staff, contributing to shaping the intellectual directions of the work undertaken.

Who is eligible to participate?

Any student (undergraduate or graduate) enrolled at McMaster University is eligible to be a Student Partner. While prior experience in teaching and learning research/practice would be an asset, it is not required. Indeed, we're interested in working with a wide variety of students with a range of backgrounds and experiences, including members of equity seeking groups. Some projects do indicate preferences for students with particular experiences, skills, or educational levels, so be sure to read the project descriptions carefully and to make the case for why you would be a good fit.

Any McMaster staff, faculty or student working on a relevant teaching and learning project is eligible to submit that project for inclusion in the Student Partner Program. Please note that students submitting projects will need to do so in collaboration with a faculty/staff member (i.e., we cannot currently advertise student-proposed projects to potential faculty partners. Instead, interested students might consider approaching a faculty/staff member and seeing if that faculty/staff member would be interested in working with them on the project should it be accepted for the SPP.)

What types of projects can be included in the Student Partners program?

Any teaching and learning project being conducted via a partnership between McMaster faculty/staff and students, and meeting the following criteria, may be submitted for consideration:

1. The project includes clear opportunities for students to contribute to the intellectual direction of the work (i.e., it is not simply an attempt to alleviate staff/faculty workload);

2. Staff/faculty involved in the project are committed to taking a partnership approach, and able to devote the time necessary to develop partnerships; and,
3. The project has elements that are appropriate to and would benefit from student perspectives.

Projects involving a partnership between the MacPherson Institute and staff/faculty collaborators from across campus are especially welcome, as are projects aligning tightly with MacPherson's stated priorities for a given year. To see examples of past projects, please visit the 'Student Partners' page of our website.

PROTOCOL AND GUIDELINES: HOW TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP

The following are general guidelines we suggest each partnership consider throughout their time together. Not every project is the same and therefore not all guidelines may be appropriate in all cases.

Before the Project Begins

1. Read this handbook, paying particular attention to the processes and procedures.
2. Students: make sure your email addresses are on the Student Partners email distribution list.
3. Acknowledge that partnership involves true collaboration, NOT just students completing assigned tasks.
 - The traditional process wherein staff/faculty fully control projects should NOT be expected.
 - If a student does not know exactly what is expected of them, the student could brainstorm ideas and then discuss them with the staff/faculty member.
 - Consider mutually agreed-upon guidelines, working towards a true partnership.
 - Have a conversation about the level of independence and autonomy appropriate for the student.
4. Identify short and long term goals of the (larger) project.
5. Discuss how the partnership's work will translate into the final product:
 - What can be included on each team member's CV?
 - What will be the authorship on any publications (articles, presentations, posters, etc.)?
6. Consider where it is most appropriate and convenient for the student to work (office, home, other).
7. Discuss and determine how literature and documents will be shared (e.g., Dropbox, Zotero, Mendeley, Google Docs, email, other).

During the Project

1. Remember, scholarly work is often exploratory, so expectations may shift and change as the project proceeds.
 - As concerns arise, ensure they are addressed promptly and efficiently.
 - All team members should be encouraged to voice concerns about the direction/outcome(s) of the project.
2. If there are problems outside of the project that impact your ability to contribute to it, address them as above and have a conversation within the partnership.
3. Students—Don't be afraid to take the initiative and make suggestions.
 - Pursuing tangential topics is often a natural part of the research process, so long as they fall under the scope of the original project.
 - When in doubt, it is best to discuss possible new directions with other project partners.

4. Plan partnership meetings together.
 - **How and where will you meet?** Consider alternatives to face-to-face meetings using web conferencing tools such as Blackboard Collaborate or Google Hangouts.
 - **When will you meet?** Many staff and faculty are usually in the office 08:30-16:30 or 09:00-17:00, but students' classes are usually scheduled during these times too! Make sure meeting times are convenient for all.
 - **How frequently will you meet?** Meetings should be frequent enough to support the project without being disruptive. Frequency may change over the course of the project. If possible, it might be helpful to book a regular time slot every week or two, and then cancel meetings as needed. (It's always easier to cancel!)
 - **What kind of meeting summaries will you create?** Collate action items and appropriate deadlines for future reference.
5. Elicit regular feedback from all members of the group.
6. Work together to plan student time on the project will spent and to monitor hours worked.
 - Students should not work more hours than have been allocated to the project. Any work relating to the project (e.g., training, meetings, literature reviews, work at home, etc.) should be included.
 - Hours need to be worked within the time frame specified (i.e., the funding is for the specified project term only, and cannot be carried over)

After the Project / Partnership Has Ended

At the end of each project term, the individual who initially proposed the SPP project will prepare (in collaboration with the project team) a ONE to TWO page report on the project's outcomes to date. This statement should include:

- A description of the project (including its aims and goals);
- A discussion of the project's outcomes and outputs to date;
- An indication of what, if anything, is planned in terms of next steps;
- A personal reflection on the value and limitations of the project and partnership process.
- Submission of this final report is a prerequisite for consideration for future Student Partners project proposals.

Decide what is going to happen after the project has finished. For example,

- Will the partnership stay in touch?
- Would the students like to stay involved in the following term if such an opportunity exists?
- What will happen with any unfinished work?

PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

Selecting Projects and Advertising Positions

Student Partners currently join teams three times a year—in May, September, and January. In order to facilitate this process, we have established the following timelines and procedures.

Project Term	Call for Projects	Call for Students	Application Review	Students Notified
May to August (Summer Term)	Early to mid-March	Mid March to Early April	Early-Mid April	End April
Sept. to April (Full Term) or Sept. to Dec. (Term 1 Only)	Late June to Early July	Early July to Early Aug	Early-Mid Aug	End August
Jan. to April (Term 2 Only)	Early to Mid Nov	Mid Nov to Early Dec	Early-Mid Dec	End December

Call for Student Partner Projects

***Please note:** the information below applies to projects being submitted for consideration *outside* the Course Design/Delivery Consultant stream of the SPP. The Course Design/Delivery Consultants stream operates according to a particular model, which is described on the following page: <http://mi.mcmaster.ca/student-consultant-partnerships-with-faculty/>. If you're a faculty/staff member (or a student working in partnership with faculty/staff) and would like to submit your course to be included in the Course Design/Delivery Consultants stream, please follow the instructions at the above link (and note that different deadlines might apply). If you would like to submit a course design project to be included in the SPP *outside* the Course Design/Delivery Consultant stream, please follow the instructions below.

Approximately two months prior the start of a new project term, a Call for Student Partner Projects will be distributed broadly on campus. Individuals interested in submitting a project for consideration will be asked to provide a brief (150 word) description of the project, which outlines its central goals/purpose, the kinds of work in which students might engage, and the staff/faculty involved. If there are particular experiences/attributes students applying for the project will need, these should also be identified, though we strongly encourage those submitting projects to refrain from restricting opportunities to participate as much as possible. The submitted project description will be used both to assess the project's fit with the Student Partners Program, and to advertise the project to potential student partners (if new students are being sought).

Individuals proposing projects should also submit a brief statement explaining how the proposed work aligns with the requirements and goals of the SPP. This explanation will not be included in the call for student applicants, but will be used in the selection process.

Alongside these materials, project proposals must include the number of students requested and the expected size/scope of the project (including the approximate number of hours students will contribute). Requests regarding number of students and project scope will be fully considered but cannot be guaranteed.

Teams wishing to extend existing Student Partners beyond the initial project term must reapply for consideration. In addition to the materials requested above, an individual proposing a project extension will need to submit an 'end of term report'. In these applications, teams will need to indicate if they would like current Student Partners to return and/or if the proposal should be included in the call for new applicants.

NOTE—The project submission deadline is firm. Projects submitted after the specified date will not be considered.

Project Selection Process

A project review committee consisting of MacPherson staff/faculty, students, and campus partners (where available) will be struck to review project proposals. This committee will be chaired by the coordinator of the SPP, and members will have had experience participating in the SPP in past wherever possible. Committee members with projects under consideration will not participate in the ranking of their own proposals.

When projects are initially submitted, they will be vetted by the review committee and ranked according to the criteria specified above. Any projects that do not meet basic criteria will not be included in the call distributed to students; the individual submitting the proposal will be notified.

The remainder of the submitted projects will be included; however, this does NOT guarantee they will be funded. Rather, student interest in the projects will be used as the final criterion in selecting projects. Once student applications come in, the committee will consider if the level of student interest shifts their initial project rankings, and final decisions will be made.

Call for Student Applications

Approximately 1.5 months prior to the start of a new project term, a call for student applicants will be developed and circulated. This call will include general information about the SPP, as well as a list of potential projects for which student partners are being sought. It will be posted on the MacPherson Institute website, sent to Department and Faculty offices, and circulated via other appropriate channels (e.g., posting to the MacPherson listserv and Twitter accounts)

Interested students will be asked to select up to THREE projects from the list and to write a brief (~250 word) interest statement for each. These project interest statements should include the following:

1. The project title (from the Call for Student Applications)
2. A description of why the project seems interesting/important to the applicant. (Why do you want to join the project team? What are your goals in relation to the project?)
3. A proposal for the role the applicant might play on the project team. (What might you do to develop the project and help it meet its goals? What work do you see yourself carrying out?)
4. An indication of the skills/experiences/interests/perspectives the applicant would bring to the project. (Why are you a good fit for this project?)

Students will read the project descriptions carefully, noting any requested experiences or skills. Be sure to apply for projects for which you are appropriately qualified, or for which you feel you could make a meaningful contribution.

Remembering that the goal of the SPP is to develop meaningful partnerships where all participants can make intellectual contributions, applicants are encouraged to highlight their ability to partner in this way and to offer one or two of their own ideas and perspectives on their selected projects.

To complete their applications, students must submit up to three interest statements, along with an up-to-date resume, by the submission deadline. The deadline is firm; late applications will not be accepted.

Student Selection Process

Following the application deadline and final project selection, individuals who submitted successful project proposals will be forwarded the student applications submitted for their project(s). They will review and rank these applications.

Teams may opt to interview a short list of candidates as part of the ranking process. Project leads wishing to conduct interviews must work quickly as there is a tight timeline between when applications are received and when their rankings are due (approximately 2 weeks). Remember, some students may be away from campus during the ranking process, so consider conducting interviews by phone/Skype. Project teams that elect to conduct interviews are responsible for scheduling interviews and contacting interviewees.

Project leads must submit their rank ordering of candidates to the SPP coordinator by the specified deadline (typically two weeks after receiving applications). The coordinator will look at everyone's submitted preferences and match students with projects. There is a chance a given team might not be paired with their first choice, as students will submit to several projects and may have been ranked highly for each. Every effort will be made, however, to match project teams with students from amongst their top choices.

Once students have been matched with projects, the SPP coordinator will inform the project leads and the student(s), and invite both to attend an orientation meeting.

COMPENSATION & PRACTICALITIES

Once a candidate has been selected they will be invited to an orientation meeting at which they fill out required paperwork and receive information about compensation processes. Current rates of compensation will be included in the call for student applications each term.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR STUDENT PARTNER EXPERIENCE

The following list of tips and suggestions was compiled from the results of a survey distributed to previous MacPherson Student Partners and staff/faculty about their experiences in the program. These tips are mostly aimed at Student Partners, but it would be useful for staff/faculty to also keep these points in mind.

Establishing Goals and Relationships

We all know the months go by quickly during the school year. So, using the first few weeks of your involvement with the program to establish relationships, deadlines, and goals is crucial to the success of the overall project.

- Jump right in, particularly if the timeline for your project is short. Set up a meeting and acquaint yourself with the project and its goals as quickly as you can, to leave ample time for the work itself.
- Be critical. You might feel as though your opinion isn't valuable because you just joined or started working on the project, but your perspective as a student is valuable.
- Don't feel constrained by the way the project is framed. Projects evolve and you should feel free to share questions and opinions that will shape the work into its final form.
- Get to know your partners early on – how they like to work, communicate, and what their schedules are like.
- Share your goals for the project and find out what your research partners' career and personal goals are. Try to determine how you can help your group members achieve their goals.
- Set clear guidelines and expectations for the role(s) each partner will play in the project.

Communication and Accountability

Regular communication and keeping up with tasks are essential to group work. Below, you'll find some strategies that worked for students in the past and some things they wish they'd done differently:

1. **Have regular meetings**—Although this may become harder to maintain during busier times of the year, setting up regular weekly or biweekly check ins can help make a habit of these meetings early on.
2. **Update your partners on your progress**—Keep your group members up to date about your work, progress, and any potential roadblocks. You can do this by sending out regular updates, scheduling meetings, or using a teamwork productivity application, like Slack.
3. **Set interim deadlines**—Maintain a schedule of interim deadlines to help you and your partners stay on track, especially for parts of the project that might be overwhelming and complicated. These can also be flexible and provide opportunities to evaluate the ongoing project on a macro- and micro-level.
4. **Use alternative modes of communication**—Given the time constraints we all have during the year, as well as our need to balance our school and work life with other commitments, it's important to be open to

alternative modes of communicating, especially for larger groups. Create subgroups and have smaller meetings, or using online communication tools such as Skype and Google Hangouts.

5. **Hold yourself accountable**—While it's important to set external deadlines, you also need to hold yourself accountable. Work as a Student Partner can be flexible and independent, which requires a lot of self-learning and discipline. Try your best to spread the work evenly and to avoid falling behind on tasks, and make sure to let your partners know in a timely manner if you are unable to complete your work.

Making the Most of Your Partnership Experience

The Student Partners Program gives students the opportunity to be involved with academic research and teaching and learning projects, while also providing essential student perspectives for these projects. Many opportunities will become available to students throughout the year. Past students recommend seizing these opportunities as they come.

1. **Approach people at MacPherson**—MacPherson Institute staff members are welcoming of students and are involved in the field of education through research, technology, or development. It's a great place to get to know professionals in the field if this is a career or academic path you're considering.
2. **Learn about different projects**—Although your project will take up most of your time, learning about projects that other people are participating in will give you a broader understanding and appreciation for the work done through the SPP and on teaching and learning at McMaster.
3. **Use the dedicated space to work in the office**—MacPherson has limited office space available to Student Partners during the year. Make use of the space during business hours as a place to work on your research tasks. It can be a nice and quiet break from your other work environments.
4. **Participate in papers and conference presentations**—As you work on your project, opportunities might arise to participate in writing a paper or presenting your scholarship at a conference. Seize these opportunities when they come up; they are extremely educational experiences, and can provide you with an in-depth understanding of the process of disseminating research/project findings.

APPENDICES

*Note—In the following appendices, some items highlighted in yellow. The relevant MacPherson staff/faculty member should fill these items in as appropriate to the project. Forms provided are for reference purposes only.

APPENDIX 1—Recommendations from the Literature on Staff-Student Partnerships

Increasingly, universities and colleges are seeking to engage students as partners in their own learning, and in the enhancement of both teaching and research. Throughout the higher education literature, there are numerous references to the importance of faculty and student partnerships, as well as to challenges and best practices for faculty and students working together. In addition, the literature notes that student-faculty partnerships can take many forms and can have various meanings. Therefore, in this context, it is important to define what is meant by partnerships.

How do we define partnership?

Partnerships involve the formation of reciprocal relationships between students and academic staff. More specifically, as Healey, Flint and Harrington (2014, pp. 12) state, partnerships are “... a relationship in which all involved—students, academics, professional services staff, senior managers, students’ unions, and so on—are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together. Partnership is essentially a process of engagement, not a product. It is a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself.”

Benefits of Partnership

The benefits of partnerships in higher education settings have been well documented (Barnes, Goldring, Bestwick, & Wood, 2010; Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014; Jarvis, Dickerson & Stockwell, 2013). For example, partnerships in teaching and learning can help to do the following:

- Build research capacity through joint enquiry;
- Increase engagement with teaching and learning;
- Develop students’ and staff members’ knowledge and skills;
- Foster a sense of personal and social responsibility;
- Increase personal and professional confidence; and,
- Lead to a greater sense of belonging and community within the university setting.

Challenges in Partnership

Engaging students as partners in teaching and learning is a highly contextual and complex process, both in theory and practice (Healey et al., 2014). Critical reflection throughout the partnership on the challenges and tensions that arise is integral. It is particularly important to reflect critically on the issues listed below within one’s own context—whether it is at the “initiative, module, programme, faculty or institutional level” (Healey et al., 2014, p. 30).

Navigating Power Relationships

Common in pedagogical literature on student-staff partnerships in teaching and learning is the issue of power relationships (Bovill et al., 2011; Cook-Sather, 2014; Healey et al., 2014; Marquis et al., 2016). In particular, “negotiating existing power dynamics” is listed as a major issue in one case study (Marquis et al., 2016) that explored the experiences of students and staff in their partnerships at McMaster University’s Student Partners program. While participants in both groups articulated their interest in taking on non-traditional roles, both groups tended to return to their conventional positions. Healey et al. (2014) recommend that staff reflect critically on the implications of these power relationships within their own contexts. For example, ask yourself the following questions: in the partnership, who is responsible for decision making, acquiring access to resources, etc.?

However, despite the wish to avoid staff and faculty dominance over partnerships and projects, it is also imperative to strike a balance between guidance and self-direction for students. In one case study, students commented upon their need to have a clearer set of objectives in order to concentrate their efforts (Marquis et al. 2016). It is important to develop effective and collaborative relationships that will result in meaningful roles and responsibilities for those involved, and will allow for members to feel comfortable to ask for more guidance, if required.

Inclusivity and Diversity

It is important for those engaging in pedagogical projects to strive to maintain a diverse and inclusive working environment. Much of the literature points to the need to widen the involvement of students and staff as co-inquirers, and to thus include more diverse voices and identities (Felten et al., 2013; Healey et al., 2014; McLeod, 2011; Marquis et al., 2016). Marquis et al. have noted that opportunities for partnership often extend to only a limited number of academically 'strong' students, a practice that restricts the number of perspectives brought to the table. Healey et al. (2014) suggest creating a strong sense of community is key to building sustainable partnerships, and encourage members to examine current practices and to reflect critically on whether there are structural or cultural barriers preventing certain groups from participating. Felten (2013) offers a number of recommendations to generate a more inclusive environment, including engaging with students in flexible places on campus to counter the power asymmetries of the traditional classroom, and encouraging the expression of diverse voices.

Time and Sustainability

Differences in the length of time students and staff are typically connected to a project, and issues connected to sustainability and transitions, are also potential challenges to partnership (Healey et al. 2014, Bovill et al. 2014; Marquis et al. 2016). In particular, Marquis et al. note that time as a limiting factor can contribute to other challenges—including difficulties in finding times to meet, and increased stress and uncertainty due to rushed timelines. Healey et al. (2014) recognize it takes time for students to move from being peripheral to full members of the teaching and learning community, and encourage staff and student peers provide support and encouragement to incoming students, as they become active members within the community. Bovill et al. (2014) discuss the importance of building a planned ending into the shared aims of the partnership, a decision that may make it easier for individuals to agree to collaborate.

For further discussion on student-staff partnerships, refer to Healey et al. (2014).

Recommendations

Starting Partnerships (Bovill, Felten and Cook-Sather, 2014)

1. Create a shared set of goals and objectives from the beginning. Staff: provide students the opportunity to develop some of the objectives (Marquis et al., 2016). Understand things might not proceed as planned, so it is crucial to be patient throughout the process.
2. Staff: be attentive to the language used when communicating with the student.
3. Staff: create a support system by meeting with other staff members who are interested in student-staff partnerships or have experience partnering with students.

Building Partnerships

1. Provide rewards for those working in partnership, to encourage continued collaboration (for both students and staff) (Bovill et al., 2014).
2. Recognize the contributions students make (Marquis et al., 2016).

3. Staff: provide most direction in the beginning and as the partnership progresses, become less directive (Delpish et al., 2010; Marquis et al., 2016).
4. Ensure a diverse range of participants are involved (Bovill et al., 2014).
5. Provide further learning and development opportunities for all those involved (Bovill et al., 2014). In particular, aim to find opportunities for students to grow (e.g., attending and presenting at conferences/staff meetings, co-authoring a paper, providing ideas that help shape a project, etc.) (Delpish et al., 2010; Marquis et al., 2016).
6. Reflect on and value the process of partnership throughout the collaboration (Bovill et al. 2014).
7. Understand when and how to end partnerships formally (Bovill et al., 2014). Not all partnerships work, so it is equally important to “be honest about when partnership is not appropriate or desirable (Healey et al. 2014, pp. 9).”

Extending Partnerships (Bovill et al. 2014)

1. View the collaboration as a reciprocal relationship.
2. Staff: consider and reflect upon your own attitudes regarding power dynamics within the student-staff relationship.
3. Staff: Develop ways to negotiate and share responsibility with student co-collaborators.
4. Staff: Recognize, discuss, and be honest about where the power imbalance lies.

For more information on recommendations for student-staff partnerships, refer to Marquis et al. (2016) and Bovill et al. (2014).

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APPENDIX 2—First Meeting Document

This document is intended as a guide to follow during the first meeting of your partnership. The points listed are not exhaustive, but are rather intended to get you started.

Potential Agenda Items

1. **Introductions**
 - Begin to get to know one another professionally and personally.
2. **Goals Discussion**
 - Discuss the short and long term goals of the project, including any plans for publication/presentation.
 - Invite and offer additional perspectives on further or complementary directions.
 - Discuss student and staff/faculty personal goals for the project. (What experiences do you hope to have? What skills do you hope to learn? What tasks would you like to complete?)
 - Determine what is possible in terms of tailoring work to these interests.
3. **Expectations**
 - Discuss the expectations for all partners. (What role(s) will each member play? What tasks will they perform? What deliverables might come out of the project, and who will be involved in those? Is publication/presentation an option, and—if so—what is necessary for authorship credit? How much independence/autonomy will students have?)
4. **Communication Plan**
 - Discuss what tools you'd like to use for communication, completing work (e.g., particular kinds of analysis software), meetings, document sharing.
 - Determine who will set up shared documents, virtual meeting spaces, etc.
5. **Schedule and Practicalities**
 - Discuss the work schedule (How should time be spent and when? Where can students work?)
 - Go over the compensation processes discussed in the orientation
 - Determine the frequency and timing of meetings, and set an initial meeting schedule if possible.
 - Confirm that necessary paperwork has been filled out and submitted, and that training requirements are understood
 - Introduce team members to others (e.g., MacPherson Staff) with whom they might connect on the project
 - Discuss available resources (e.g., access to software, support for conference presentation)
6. **Questions**—Take a few minutes to ask and answer any outstanding questions.
7. **Next Steps**—Determine specific action items to be completed before next meeting.