Transdisciplinary Working

What is Transdisciplinary Working?

Transdisciplinary working (TW) is an approach to research that involves scientists from **diverse academic disciplines** and **experiential stakeholders** (e.g. older adults and caregivers, industry and financers, policymakers) as researchers or partners. The aim of this type of approach is to solve complex social problems by developing innovations and knowledge that have real-world impact. It is *not* research that involves only one discipline or sector, or research that includes experiential stakeholders only as research participants or subjects.

Why is Transdisciplinary Working important for AGE-WELL?

- Enhances the scientific quality of research
- Improves research productivity
- Achieves funding success
- Furthers the dissemination of research knowledge and outputs
- Progresses the adoption of technological products and services
- Enriches learning and training for novice researchers

How do I include components of Transdisciplinary Working in my project?

1. **Are you collaborating with a diverse set of stakeholders (e.g. from across disciplines and sectors)?**

   - Does your project include one or more experiential stakeholders on the research team as a co-investigator or partner (e.g. as research team member or advisory board member)?
   - Do experiential stakeholders have influence on one or more stages of the research process? (e.g. problem setting, study design, data collection, data analysis, knowledge mobilization, and commercialization)

2. **Does your study design integrate knowledge across disciplinary boundaries and sectors?**

   - Do you use theories or concepts from different disciplines and/or different sectors?
   - Do you use a variety of research methods (e.g. interviews, surveys, policy analysis) from different research traditions?

3. **Are you adopting an action-oriented and iterative approach to research and development that allows questions and goals to emerge from consultation and interaction across stakeholders?**

   - Do you have a set of goals along with clear tasks and deliverables to which all stakeholders agreed to and support?
   - Are you reflecting on these goals on an ongoing basis, and further refining them to acquire a better understanding of the research problem and how to achieve possible solutions?

4. **Are you actively involved in community engagement and outreach producing materials that are both developed *with* and for a variety of stakeholder groups?**

   - Are you creating opportunities to engage your community partners on your project (e.g. via stakeholder-driven activities and events)?
   - Are you ensuring that your research products are socially relevant and valuable to stakeholders by actively seeking feedback from them?

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How do I evaluate and assess the achievement of my Transdisciplinary Working goals?

5. **Qualitative success indicators include (but are not restricted to) assessment that the project:**

   - Involves the public voice (e.g. via policy forums, community outreach)
   - Holds social relevance (e.g. via policy contributions, news and media highlights, policy / advocacy research program, matched goals and visions with local stakeholders)
   - Integrates local stakeholders in the research team as active decision makers (e.g. via observations of inclusivity in meetings and ad hoc working groups)
   - Provides accessible information to all project members (e.g. via translating unidisciplinary knowledge into readily accessible information to members of different disciplines and sectors)
   - Encourages and supports frank and critical dialogue (e.g. quality of brainstorming sessions with members of different disciplines and sectors)
   - Establishes long-term cross sector or inter-professional relationships (e.g. acquiring new and international knowledge, generating new ideas, learning about other disciplines, joint-collaboration in writing articles)
   - Creates the conditions for and achieves shared knowledge and practice (e.g. co-creation of shared vision, aim, concepts and goals across disciplines and sectors)

6. **Quantitative success indicators include evidence of:**

   - Stakeholder decision-making and knowledge authority (e.g. balance of local stakeholders and researchers in decision-making circle [yes/no])
   - Collaborative productivity (e.g. # of transdisciplinary (TD) peer-reviewed publications and their impact, # of TD presentations at scientific meetings, # and types of grants received, # of awards received, types of academic advancement)
   - Trainee preparedness to conduct TD research (e.g. preparedness to conduct culturally-responsive and socially relevant research [yes/no], development of health disparities research skills [yes/no], understanding and application of multiple, diverse methods [yes/no], preparedness to work with local stakeholder groups [yes/no], research leadership opportunities [yes/no])
   - Diversity of research grant proposals (e.g. engagement of grantees in cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration [yes/no], attracting young/new investigators [yes/no], nurturing of grantees' career trajectories within TD research [yes/no])

Who can I connect with for support in Transdisciplinary Working?

The TW team can be reached at: transdisciplinarywork@agewell-nce.ca

Resources:

1. Transdisciplinary Journal Club and Seminar Series: The journal club meets every other month. Three seminars are held every year. You can participate online (Vidyo) or in person (Toronto/Vancouver).
2. Knowledge Repository: Articles and resources on transdisciplinarity, available online on the AGE-WELL intranet: http://members.agewell-nce.ca/knowledgerepository/transdisciplinarity-literature-database/