Reviewer’s report

Title: Required versus inspired research partnerships: a qualitative inquiry

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Reviewer: Moriah Ellen

Reviewer’s report:

This is a very interesting paper that addresses an important issue in today’s research environment. Numerous funding agencies require knowledge users to participate in research grants, and this study sheds light on the different types of partnerships. Many health systems and policy researchers include knowledge users on their research applications, even if this is not a requirement from the funding agency. Therefore the findings from this study, the barriers and facilitators, can assist researchers in ensuring that they are building a positive relationship for all the parties involved. I view this as an important study and I do think the results of this study should be published. However, certain revisions need to be made before this study can be published. I would be pleased to review the paper again after the revisions. I look forward to seeing this article in print.

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. It is unclear to me in the methods (second to last paragraph) if one or two researchers analyzed and categorized the data. This will effect my confidence in the results.

2. The respondents and overall survey sample is not clearly described.
   a. In the methods section, are the 203 researchers that received the survey the PIs? Were the rest of the researchers and knowledge users on the various grants invited to participate?
   b. What is the unit of analysis: the partnerships, participants, grants…
   c. Was the response rate 100%? i.e. were the 49 people you interviewed the only ones you contacted? How did you go about contacting them?
   d. In the results section, in the first sentence, you mention that you interviewed 49 participants, and 6 researchers and 6 users were matched pairs which therefore means there were 43 partnerships under analysis, however in the last sentence of that same project you refer to 49 partnerships: please clarify.
   e. In the results, can you please provide more information on the respondents i.e. affiliations, number of grants (both with and without partnership requirements)….

3. I think the taxonomy is really well-developed: Can you further clarify how the questions in Table 1 were analyzed to determine which partnership was a token, asymmetric or egalitarian partnership. I also think that the questions in Table 1
are missing some information i.e. provide both question options for researchers and users, what is the the scale to answer the final question….

4. Please clarify at the front of the paper and in the methods section that this report is focusing on the interviews and not on the survey. I know that in the background section, third paragraph, the authors write that the “focus of this paper is on the qualitative component…” however it was not fully clear to me since as I continued to read the paper there were sections where the survey and the interviews were discussed interchangeably. I would recommend that the authors state it clearly again in the methods section. Furthermore, modify the methods and results subsections in the abstract since the first sentence discusses the survey and it seems to portray that this study will discuss the survey and its results but it does not.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

5. There are grammatical errors throughout the report: I suggest the authors review it and make all necessary changes. There are some typos, a period missing here or there, and a general lack of commas throughout the report which make it difficult to read. Also, sometimes there are paragraphs that are only one sentence long: I would read through the paper and edit it appropriately. (“Minor issues not for publication”)

6. The title does not fully reflect the actual paper: to me the title seems to indicate that the authors were examining partnerships that were voluntary versus partnerships that were required. However, in this report, all partnerships that were examined were required by CIHR: it was more the nature of the partnership that was examined. I suggest revising the title.

7. In the second sentence of the background the following statement is made: “This general approach to research is being referred to by terms such as collaborative research, participatory action research, action oriented research, community-based research, engaged scholarship, Mode 2 knowledge production, and co-production of knowledge despite each having its own subtle uniqueness.” It would be great to see some references.

8. Tables 2 and 3 do not add much information. The information provided in the tables is already in the text and I think that Tables 2 and 3 should be removed.

9. When you discuss turnover in the results section I am assuming the issue is on the knowledge user side and not the researcher side: I would just state that.

10. On p 16, in the first paragraph, you state “partnerships in our research did not readily talk about barriers of resource constraints (8), concerns about decreased research quality (11), lack of trust or partnership sustainability (12)” As I read the paper, it did come across to me that the participants discussed a lack of financial incentives (i.e. a quote from p10) and the need to establish trust. I therefore question when the authors state that participants did not readily talk about resource constraints or lack of trust since it seems to me from the results section that they do discuss resource constraints and a need to establish trust between the partners.
Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

11. The authors describe that they will be examining partnerships from researchers and users that have applied to three types of CIHR calls i.e. PHSI, KSA and K2A. I think it would be beneficial to the readers if in an Appendix a brief table was provided that explained the overall purpose of each call and broad descriptives.

12. Are the survey results published? If so, it would be great to see a reference.

13. The interview guide was meant to look at many different items, one of which was “how partnership research differs from non-partnered research”. Were the participants asked their experiences in both? Curious to know what the findings are of this question.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interests.