

# In Brief: Achieving a Transparent, Actionable Framework for Public–Private Partnerships for Food and Nutrition Research



American Society for Nutrition

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## SUMMARY

**A** NUMBER OF NUTRITION, food safety, and health-related nonprofit organizations and government agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), and Food and Drug Administration (FDA), participated in a working meeting convened in December 2014 in Washington, to discuss and reach a consensus among individuals participating on principles that would provide guidance to research public–private partnerships (PPPs) related to food, nutrition, and health. This meeting was motivated by the urgent need for an expanded, rigorous, and focused research agenda in food and nutrition that is driven by increased awareness that food, nutrition, and human health are closely linked through complex interactions, and a recognition that associated costs contribute substantially to rising national health care expenditures. Participants considered the fact that new research approaches are critically needed to capitalize on our current understanding of the role of food and food systems in chronic disease prevention and management and to translate this knowledge into the development of public health

interventions, innovative products, and evidence-based policies that meet the public's expectations and support the health of the nation. However, government resources devoted to food and nutrition research are shrinking, stifling economic growth and innovation in the food and nutrition sector and delaying the opportunity to better harmonize the food system and human health.

The group then deliberated, reaching consensus on the following principles designed to develop a transparent and actionable framework for establishment and operation of PPPs to achieve the best food and nutrition-related research outcomes. Participants used the International Life Sciences Institute North America (ILSI North America) 2013 published principles as a starting point.<sup>1</sup> This meeting was motivated by the need to stimulate the expansion, accessibility, and acceptance of PPPs by unifying and moving existing principles for food and nutrition research PPPs forward, making them publicly available for all interested parties to reference and use. Although a number of groups have addressed criteria for conduct of PPPs, most reports have not been readily accessible in the public domain. Now, with such widespread involvement and endorsement, it is hoped that these principles will be broadly used by the collaborating organizations and others to create PPPs that will ultimately improve public health. The principles have been published along with a summary of the meeting to develop them in the June 2015 issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.<sup>2</sup>

## Principles for Public–Private Partnerships for Food and Nutrition Research

Prerequisite Principle:

1. Have a clearly defined and achievable goal to benefit the public.

Governance Principles:

2. Articulate a governance structure including a clear statement of work, rules, and partner roles, responsibilities, and accountability, to build in trust, transparency, and mutual respect as core operating principles—acknowledging there may be “deal breakers” precluding the formation of an effective partnership in the first place.
3. Ensure that objectives will meet stakeholder partners' public and private needs, with a clearly defined baseline to monitor progress and measure success.

Operational Principles:

4. Considering the importance of balance, ensure that all members possess appropriate levels of bargaining power.
5. Minimize conflict of interest by recruiting a sufficient number of partners to mitigate influence by any single member and to broaden private-sector perspectives and expertise.
6. Engage partners who agree upon specific and fundable (or supportable through obtainable resources) research questions to be addressed by the partnership.
7. Enlist partners who are committed to the long term as well as the sharing of funding and research data.
8. Along with government and the private sector, include academics and other members of civil society (eg, foundations, non-governmental organizations [NGOs], consumers) as partners.
9. Select objective measurements capable of providing common

ground for both public and private-sector research goals.

10. Adopt research questions and methodologies established by partners with transparency about all competitive interests, ideally in the precompetitive space.
11. Be flexible in implementing the PPP process.
12. Ensure ongoing transparent communications both among partners and between PPP and the public.

The consensus on principles to serve as a framework for creating and operating PPPs can open future opportunities for research collaborations, offering the clear value of shared expertise from the different sectors/players and enhancing public confidence in PPP research. Mutual trust will likely be enhanced between the public and private sectors, including industry, NGOs, foundations and other such entities. The resulting boost to the movement toward PPPs is timely and important to grow

resources for nutrition and food research.

#### References

1. Rowe S, Alexander N, Kretzer A, et al. Principles for building public-private partnerships to benefit food safety, nutrition, and health research. *Nutr Rev*. 2013;71(10):682-691.
2. Alexander N, Rowe S, Brackett RE, et al. Achieving a transparent, actionable framework for public-private partnerships for food and nutrition research. *Am J Clin Nutr*. 2015;101(6):1359-1363.