

# Assessing Best Practices in Virtual Interdisciplinary Collaboration During COVID

Marsha Gordon, MPH - Executive Director, RWJMS Center Advancing Research & Evaluation for Patient Centered Care (RWJMS CARE-PC)  
Shawna Hudson, PhD – Director, RWJMS CARE-PC; Chair, Dept. of Family Medicine and Community Health Research Division



<p><b>Abstract:</b></p> <p>When COVID-19 reached US shores, it forced national, state, regional, local, and corporate officials to rapidly implement social distancing measures, personal protective equipment protocols, and lockdowns to preserve our livelihoods and lives. Concurrently, operational roadblocks were cleared at “warp speed” to advance knowledge about COVID. Rapid response federal and private funding opportunities called for interdisciplinary collaboration and dialogue across members of the translational science spectrum, from the scientists in the labs to the stakeholders of communities hardest hit by the virus. The New Jersey Alliance for Clinical and Translational Science (NJ ACTS) turned to virtual collaboration platforms for continuity. Through swift and effective implementation of remote solutions, diverse research teams developed hypothesis-driven approaches to monitor and combat the virus. These rich partnerships resulted in unprecedented scientific, technological, political, and social agility and innovation. This RLA project will identify key stakeholders to develop a work plan to assess best practices in virtual collaborations to encourage and enhance ongoing interdisciplinary relationships online.</p>		<p><b>Primary Stakeholders:</b></p> <p>Individuals that participated in meetings using virtual platforms during the pandemic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rutgers faculty, staff, and students;</li><li>• Local academic, industry, and community collaborators;</li><li>• National academic, industry, and community collaborators.</li></ul>
<p><b>Key Steps/Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Share the project vision;</li><li>• Solicit volunteers to 1) contribute their experiences; 2) identify key stakeholders; 3) propose priority areas;</li><li>• Convene a working group of stakeholders to develop a work plan.</li></ul>	<p><b>Effectiveness Measures:</b></p> <p>The impact of this initiative will be measured by the number of relationships built (university-wide, locally and nationally among academic, industry, and community collaborators); number of key stakeholders engaged; number of meetings scheduled; priorities identified; and best-practices shared.</p>	<p><b>Communication/Engagement:</b></p> <p>Progress will be shared during virtual meetings and via email. The working group will determine next steps for communication of best practices which can include infographics, white papers, and publications depending on the priorities of stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>Proposed Timeline:</b></p> <p>March/April 2022 - Share the project vision March/April/May 2022 - Solicit volunteers to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) share their experiences;</li><li>2) identify key stakeholders;</li><li>3) propose priority areas.</li></ol> <p>May 2022 - Convene a working group of stakeholders to develop a work plan.</p>	<p><b>Current Status/Future Directions:</b></p> <p>Faculty, staff, and student time will be necessary to make this project a reality. The NJ ACTS program and Rutgers schools including Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Social Work, School of Communication and Information and others throughout the university have programs with faculty, staff and students that are interested in exploring this topic. They are all being contacted to gauge interest and will be meeting in May of 2022. If this proposal is implemented, I would expect enhanced virtual communication of interdisciplinary groups across Rutgers and nationwide among CTSA programs.</p>	