Guide for team leaders of PEP-supported research projects

April 28, 2017

The core mission of PEP is to provide training and support for developing country researchers to produce reliable scientific evidence and inform relevant policy debates to enhance capacity for development policy analysis in developing countries. To pursue this goal, PEP has developed a sophisticated strategy based on a wide range of training and support activities.

In this strategy, team leaders play a leading role in ensuring research quality, capacity building and policy engagement. An ideal team leader should combine research expertise, interpersonal skills and administrative/financial competence. S/he needs to be rigorous and supportive, creative, organized and responsible.

The team leadership role runs throughout the entire research process, from initial team formation through to final dissemination activities. This note aims to provide guidance to team leaders in this process and to outline the ways PEP can support them in the process. The note is structured according to the four main roles of a team leader: coordination, research, capacity building and policy engagement.

Coordination

Team leaders should seek to ensure the overall coordination of their PEP project. PEP's secretariat, mentors and monitoring & evaluation team will support this work by periodically reminding teams of upcoming deadlines and regularly monitoring progress and providing support as requested by the team leader.

In particular, team leaders should pay attention to the following coordinating activities:

Creating the team

- Ensure that all team members have the necessary education and training to effectively contribute to the team.

- Consider the specific contributions that each team member could make to ensure that all project activities are accomplished. This involves a combination of complementarities (to ensure all tasks are covered) and overlaps (to allow team members to help each other on particular tasks).

- It is important to keep in mind the capacity-building objective of the project and to ensure that junior and female team members are involved and contribute as much as possible in all aspects of the research project.

Task assignments, support and supervision

- Assign tasks to each team member taking into consideration their respective skills, interests and capacity-building needs/objectives.

- Supervise and support each member to ensure satisfactory and timely progress in their tasks.

Monitoring

- Ensure all deliverables are of excellent quality and satisfy the project requirements, budget and schedule. This includes, among others, research reports, technical reports, working paper, policy engagement activities, journal submissions, etc.

- Ensure that the research project does not breach ethical standards, contract requirements or PEP institutional policies[1], and that there is no form of discrimination in the research process.

Teamwork

- Seek to create an environment oriented to trust, open communication, creative thinking, and cohesive team effort.

- Provide the team with a vision of the project objectives that motivates and inspires them.

- Intervene when necessary to aid the team in resolving issues.

- Establish team meeting times, places and agendas.

- Ensure that the team remains focused and on track.

- Work to maintain a positive and mutually respectful relationship with the mentor and all team members.

Communications

- Communicate with the project's mentors (research and policy engagement), as well as PEP staff, throughout the research process.
  - For policy engagement strategy and activities, you may designate another member of the team as first respondent and in charge of related reporting – but always under your supervision and with the agreement of the policy engagement mentor and PEP monitoring and evaluation team.

- Communicate with the project's external stakeholders as outlined in its policy engagement strategy.

- Share all information received from PEP administrative and scientific staff with the team.

- Familiarize the team with PEP requirements and support.

---

[1] See end of www.pep-net.org/guides.

Research

PEP prides itself in supporting local researchers in using the most recent research techniques to conduct robust analysis that is both policy relevant and scientifically state-of-the art. PEP research projects conclude with the publication of an externally peer-reviewed working paper, as well as a policy brief. PEP is particularly proud of the success of its researchers in publishing in leading journals and provides financial incentives to encourage this as outlined in the PEP grants manual[2].

To assist team leaders and research teams in the research process, PEP provides:

- Intensive capacity building (see next section)

- Documentation (notably its training materials and recommended readings)

- Financial support[3]

- Software: Licenses for Stata and GAMS are provided at reduced cost. PEP's own distributional analysis software and standard computable general equilibrium models are provided free of charge.

- An online journal service

- A designated mentor to provide the team with ongoing support throughout the research process.

- Additional comments by PEP scientific staff, resource persons and peers are provided at PEP annual conferences when the project proposal and final report are presented.

- External peer reviewing of all PEP working papers is also aimed at ensuring the research is of the highest possible quality.

- A series of guides and a list of other research resources.

In this context, team leaders should focus their attention on ensuring that:

- All research outputs (proposal, interim report, final report, working paper and journal article) are carried out to the highest possible academic standards.

- All citations and references are clearly indicated and that all projects outputs are devoid of any form of plagiary.

- All empirical analysis is reproducible by a third party using primary data sets and that the analysis contains no data manipulation or false reporting.

- All data collected in the context of a PEP-supported project is publicly accessible within one year of the project completion.

- Every effort is made to publish the research in the best possible journal.

---

[2] See first link on https://www.pep-net.org/guides
[3] idem

Capacity building

Team leaders play a central role in developing the capacity of junior researchers. Team leaders generally have significant expertise and experience that can be passed on to junior team members. They are also the most frequently and directly in contact with junior team members, who are the most in need of capacity building. In their efforts, team leaders are not alone, as junior team members also receive direct support from PEP:

Training

- <u>All</u> team members are <u>strongly</u> encouraged to participate in PEP online training to bring their basic skills to a minimal level where they can contribute meaningfully to their team's research project without requiring undue support and supervision from the team leader.

- Two team members are also eligible to attend the PEP annual conference when the team presents its initial proposal, where additional training is provided.

- All team members have access to the training materials and recommended readings provided on the PEP web site. These materials are organized according to the method of analysis used.

Mentoring

- The team's assigned mentor provides support to the whole team, and not only to the team leader, within the limit of the total time available for mentoring. In this perspective, communications with the mentor should always include <u>all</u> team members.

- Two team members are also eligible to participate in a three-week PEP study visit, where intensive mentoring is provided.

- Among their other responsibilities, mentors support and monitor the capacity building activities of their assigned team to ensure adequate progress.

Team leaders should seek to:

- Ensure that junior and female team members are involved and contribute as much as possible in <u>all</u> aspects of the research project.

- Devote adequate time to train, support, advise and mentor junior members to complete their assigned activities successfully.

- Request from PEP any additional mentorship and/or support from resource persons if required.

Policy engagement

While the design and implementation of the project' policy engagement and communication strategy shall be a collective/team effort, one member of the team must be designated as responsible <u>for reporting on</u> the progress and activities related to this particular aspect of the project – mainly through the **completion and periodic updates of the project's technical report**. This person will thus be considered as the main contact (and primary respondent) for the <u>PEP communication, monitoring and evaluation</u> team and related activities, as well as for the <u>PEP Policy Outreach Committee member</u> assigned as policy engagement mentor to the team (if any).

Given the already heavy workload of the team leader, PEP encourages teams to consider identifying another member of the team to take this responsibility. The team leader nonetheless maintains the responsibility to monitor and support this person to ensure that all activities are completed in a timely and satisfactory manner. The team leader shall also be copied in all exchanges between the designated team member and PEP staff/advisors.