



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – PARTNER LETTER OF AGREEMENT (PLOA)

This FAQs sheet is intended to provide information to assist you in understanding if a formal Partner Letter of Agreement may be needed when you have an external collaborator for your Early Career Researcher (ECR) Grant project.

What is a Partner Letter of Agreement (PLOA)?

A PLOA is a formal agreement/legal document which sets out the basic expectations which need to be met by all parties collaborating in relation to the project.

Why is a collaboration agreement needed?

The purpose of a PLOA is to clarify and secure the interests of the ECR awardee and the University of Melbourne, especially in relation to:

- Intellectual Property (IP)
- Publication
- Data and materials sharing
- Transfers of funding

This requirement is outlined in the **2026 ECR Grant Scheme Guidelines** (Section 11.14). Preliminary details used to assess if a PLOA may be needed are collected in the ECR Grant Application Form at Section E5: 'External Collaborators'.

Please note that it is possible having a collaborator may delay the commencement of your project as the length of time taken to negotiate and sign the PLOA is largely determined by the ability and willingness of collaborators to progress the process along.

Do I always need a formal agreement for external collaborations?

A formal agreement is not an absolute requirement. Whether or not a formal agreement is needed depends on various factors. A PLOA is generally not needed if:

- Your collaborators are playing an advisory role only and are not contributing new or specialist information that will allow them to potentially claim ownership of project IP or outputs.
- There are no plans for joint publications or shared ownership of outcomes.

How do we determine if a formal agreement is needed?

A PLOA is generally needed when:

- You or your collaborator share **data or materials**
- You or your collaborator plan on **joint publications**
- **Intellectual Property** may be created during the course of the project which may have **commercial potential**
- There are **Higher Degree Research students** from either institution involved



- There are funds transfers between institutions

What if I already have an agreement with the collaborating organisation?

ERC Grants are typically awarded to fund a new research project. Even if the project is related to other research you may already be undertaking, it is likely that any pre-existing agreements with a collaborating organisation will not extend to the new project. It is possible that a separate PLOA will be needed.

My collaborator works at UoM. Do I need a PLOA to work with them?

A PLOA is not needed if your collaborator is an employee at UoM. However, if your collaborator holds a UoM appointment (or is an honorary) *and* works for another organisation, it is important to establish the capacity in which they would be involved in your ECR project. If it is determined they are participating in the project in their UoM capacity, a PLOA is generally not needed. If, however, data/materials are being exchanged, a PLOA may be needed depending on the circumstances.

Can I start my project before the agreement is signed?

You may begin **UoM-only components (i.e. any aspect that does not include a collaborator)** of your project.

However, you **must not begin collaborative activities** (e.g. data sharing, joint experiments, joint student supervision) until a formal agreement is signed.

What if I engage regularly with others but don't think it counts as "collaboration"?

UoM acknowledges that informal academic engagement (e.g. discussions with academic mentors, attending seminars) is common.

A PLOA will only be issued when it is determined that there is a risk to your interests or UoM's that requires the collaboration to be formalised

Who determines if I need a PLOA?

At the time your ECR Grant is set up, the Researcher Development Scheme (RDS) team will provide an initial assessment to determine if your project may need a PLOA based on your application and submitted Collaboration Summary. You may be contacted to provide further information and RDS may consult with UoM's Contracts teams for additional advice. If it is determined that a PLOA is needed, the RDS team will work with you and representatives of your partner organisation to develop the agreement document.

Who do I speak to for more information?

Please contact the RDS team if you have questions or concerns regarding your collaboration and the development of a PLOA.



We also encourage you to speak to your partners and, where possible, to obtain contact details for the partner organisation's administrative or executive personnel so we can follow up with the organisation directly if needed.

What is Intellectual Property?

Intellectual Property means an intangible creation of the human intellect including but not limited to all copyright and neighbouring rights, all rights in relation to inventions (including patent rights), patents, plant varieties, registered and unregistered trademarks (including service marks), registered designs, rights in circuit layouts, and other rights resulting from intellectual activity (other than moral rights under the *Copyright Act* 1968 and Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property).

What is Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property?

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) means Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Australians' rights to their heritage, consisting of intangible and tangible aspects of the whole body of cultural practices, resources and knowledge systems developed, nurtured and refined by Indigenous people and passed on by them as part of expressing their cultural identity, including the rights and set out in Article 31 of the United Nations (UN) Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

What is considered "Data or Materials"?

Data and Materials are distinct from project findings. If Data or Materials are being either supplied or received for this project, it must be described specifically in the PLOA.

Data means specific pre-existing data supplied by one party and received by another which will be used in your project. E.g- a dataset belonging to a hospital, psychological tool useable only with permission, etc

Materials are materials supplied by one party and received by another which will be used in your project for the purpose of running the Project. E.g – materials of a biological, chemical, mechanical or other nature such as cell lines, tissue samples, soil samples etc)

What about "Publications"?

The University's general position is that we include clauses in agreements which facilitate **your ability to publish**. A collaborative publications clause setting out publications conventions as per acceptable academic protocol has been included in the PLOA.

If your collaborator wants to contribute to a publication or be acknowledged as a co-author, **an agreement is likely needed**.
