

WATER @ MICHIGAN
Thursday, January 21, 2016

Afternoon breakout sessions were organized around three approaches to research—fundamental, multi-/cross-disciplinary, and applied. Session discussions focused on identification of top research challenges related to each breakout theme and ideas for how the Water Center might help to address some of those challenges. A representative from each session reported on these discussions back to the larger group; these final comments are summarized below.

Fundamental Research Session Report:

Challenges:

- Identifying a fundable research question (the question and research needs to be novel AND doable)
- Funding priorities do not always match research priorities identified by researchers, especially repeat studies
- Articulating broader impacts of one's research
- Finding the right expertise and infrastructure to do the research

Ideas for Addressing Challenges:

- Serve as a matchmaker between researchers and practitioners/decision makers that have a problem/question that requires further study
- Convene water researchers to identify and prioritize research needs and knowledge gaps
- Help researchers identify a range of potential funding mechanisms and opportunities
- Assist researchers in identifying the 'broader impacts' of proposed research projects

Multi/Cross Disciplinary Session Report:

Challenges:

- Building the right team—identifying and engaging the right mix of collaborators
- Creating the right incentives to motivate and sustain meaningful engagement, which may vary depending on discipline or career stage
- Managing proposals and projects with large teams and multiple PIs

Ideas for Addressing Challenges:

- Think creatively about how to support a bottom up approach to team and proposal development on campus
- Organize lightning lunchtime talks on specific topics or RFPs to allow conversations and ideas for collaborations/proposals to bubble up

- Sustain the momentum around water research on campus by hosting regular events, e.g., regular lunches
- Identify and share what incentives/motivations exist across different disciplines and stages of career for engaging in collaborative research efforts
- Collect and share best practices for developing and managing multi/cross disciplinary projects

Applied Research Session Report:

Challenges:

The major challenges identified for applied research related to the relationship building process that must occur between researchers and potential users of research. These include:

- Matchmaking—the right combination of researchers and users with mutual interests;
- Alignment of interests— Needs/interests of researchers and users aligning at the front end of a research idea/project (there can sometimes be a tension between a researcher’s interest in developing new knowledge and a user’s interest in receiving a service);
- Timing—the timing has to be right for users to want and be able to use research outputs; and
- Capacity—it is important that the users have the capacity to apply the research outputs.

Ideas for Addressing Challenges:

- Serve a matchmaking function between researchers and potential users of research
- Offer training for both researchers interested in engaging users and users interested in working with researchers
- Assist with translation between researchers and potential users
- Provide a catalog of water expertise on campus
- Consider a “local emergency fund” to enable rapid response/support to significant emerging issues