Community Engaged Research
Abacus Tool Guide

What are the components of the abacus tool?

**The sides:** Each side, or section, represents the voice or power that each partner group has in the decision-making process.

**The rungs:** Each rung or bar represents the steps in the research process. They should be named to match the process and steps specific to your project.

**The beads:** Beads indicate power and collaboration responsibilities. More beads indicate more voice and commitment.

When should I use the abacus tool?

**During initial discussions with (potential) partners**—establish a basic understanding of what the steps are in the process.

**When formalizing partnership agreements, including memoranda of understanding**—to clarify who has decision-making power and collaboration responsibilities at each stage.

**While grant-writing**—to use as a visual to demonstrate proposed shared decision-making and collaboration responsibilities.

**Mid-way through a project**—to clarify how the collaboration is going and ask/reflect on whether initial decision-making and responsibilities might need to be shifted.

**During project wrap up and final reporting**—to depict how decision-making and collaboration responsibilities were actually divided (revisions may be needed).

**When working with students**—to help undergraduate and graduate students understand various stages in process and visualize shared decision-making and collaboration responsibilities with the community partners.

**When writing a journal article about the methods, processes, partnership or engagement aspects of your community engaged scholarship**—to clearly describe and illustrate the range of engagement and decision making in the research process.