Field research can be fun and exhilarating, and it can also be exhausting and trying. This article is meant to highlight a few aspects of planning to consider for researchers working in remote or foreign locations. The perspective is from that of the graduate student or postdoctoral researcher who is on the ground planning and carrying out fieldwork and managing teams of undergraduate students or staff. It is by no means an exhaustive guide on how to plan projects, and also does not detail the essential steps of generating research questions and writing successful grant proposals to support the work. Hopefully, it will give a few tips to anyone who is preparing for their first long trip to the field to help their work progress smoothly.

The seeds of success are planted in the early preparation phase—it is important to be thoughtful and thorough.

General Preparation

The seeds of success are planted in the early preparation phase—it is important to be thoughtful and thorough. Assembling a good team of people is essential to a positive outcome. Once the project is in motion, it is important to begin the process to secure visas, passports, and site access permits and import or export permits if any of these are needed. This process can take up to six months for certain documents. Check with customs offices, land managers, and the entities in charge of importation and exportation of plants and soil for specific instructions. Also, while reviewing literature for an area, step outside of your specific field and see what other types of work have been carried out where you are going. You may find interesting resources and even local researchers outside of your field who can help you understand nuances of an area.

Pre-trip Planning: Nuts and Bolts

When preparing a large field campaign, there will be far too much to keep track of in your own head, so make lists. If you are doing technical work, a forgotten tool or piece of equipment can cause major delay in progress. Sit down with the detailed proposal or protocol, line for line, each required piece of equipment where it will come from, the two things that can compromise your work, and of those, or know how to repair them.

In order to ship sensitive scientific equipment, careful packing is very important. Materials can usually be found in nearby labs or shipping departments—you should not have to buy padding and paper boxes. Procurement of materials within an academic or research institution often takes a minimum of one month. When packing for shipping, each shipped box should contain a checklist detailing what is inside. Carry on copies of all packing lists as well. Use durable labels and buy different colored electrical tape for organizing wires and equipment.

In order to ship sensitive equipment, careful packing is very important. Materials can usually be found in nearby labs or shipping departments—you should not have to buy padding and paper boxes. Procurement of materials within an academic or research institution often takes a minimum of one month. When packing for shipping, each shipped box should contain a checklist detailing what is inside. Carry on copies of all packing lists as well. Use durable labels and buy different colored electrical tape for organizing wires and equipment.

In order to ship sensitive equipment, careful packing is very important. Materials can usually be found in nearby labs or shipping departments—you should not have to buy padding and paper boxes. Procurement of materials within an academic or research institution often takes a minimum of one month. When packing for shipping, each shipped box should contain a checklist detailing what is inside. Carry on copies of all packing lists as well. Use durable labels and buy different colored electrical tape for organizing wires and equipment.

In order to ship sensitive equipment, careful packing is very important. Materials can usually be found in nearby labs or shipping departments—you should not have to buy padding and paper boxes. Procurement of materials within an academic or research institution often takes a minimum of one month. When packing for shipping, each shipped box should contain a checklist detailing what is inside. Carry on copies of all packing lists as well. Use durable labels and buy different colored electrical tape for organizing wires and equipment.

In order to ship sensitive equipment, careful packing is very important. Materials can usually be found in nearby labs or shipping departments—you should not have to buy padding and paper boxes. Procurement of materials within an academic or research institution often takes a minimum of one month. When packing for shipping, each shipped box should contain a checklist detailing what is inside. Carry on copies of all packing lists as well. Use durable labels and buy different colored electrical tape for organizing wires and equipment.