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Community Collaborations

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The goal of community collaboration is to bring individuals and members of communities, agencies and organizations together in an atmosphere of support to identify and solve existing and emerging problems that could not be solved by one group alone. Collaborators form lasting partnerships, combine resources to work toward a common goal, and provide a support base for sustaining programs.

- Collaborative groups should focus on a vision to avoid repeating stereotypes that may interfere with their ability to bring together a diverse membership.
- Collaborations share ideas and decisions, and ensure strong communications are maintained by all partners.
- Building relationships is fundamental to the success of collaborations, and each partner should be encouraged to think in new directions.
- Collaborative effort should focus on the capacities and resources the collaboration brings to the effort as opposed to being problem centered.
- Know potential collaborators to be sure your membership is a good fit. Inquire about the organization, consult newspaper files and/or United Way reports (if they are a member agency).
- Develop a written agreement which formalizes relationships between participants and clearly explains rights and obligations of each member. A key component to building collaborative strength is the participation of all members in developing the written agreement. This exercise of working together to identify the parameters within which to work will lay a foundation for future action and trust. Although there are basic components that should be included in each agreement, each group's may look very different. Should your group feel more comfortable using a generic template, one is attached at the end of the document.

The written agreement should provide:

- A clear idea of what members are expected to contribute to the partnership, and what they are entitled to take from it
- Clarification of collaborative goals
- Role of each partner
- Resources provided by each partner, and how they may be used
- Outcomes for each partner (i.e., Extension, school, community organizations)
- How communication will occur (be sure point of contact for each partner is clear, and that all partners have a contact list)
- What areas will be worked on and in what time frame
- How the group will deal with problems
- Provisions for a change in partners:
 - How to involve additional partners
 - What happens if a partner is no longer able to serve—how is s/he replaced?
 - What if partners are not fulfilling their obligations?
- Duration of the collaboration
- Time line and milestones – how to determine the group has reached them
- How funding is to be handled
 - If it comes from partner agencies
 - If it comes to the group as a whole – what is the process for distribution
- Clearly identified project leader(s)
- How will the group's progress be monitored?
- What happens to funds when the partnership is dissolved?

- Types of recognition partners will receive. Promotion of the collaboration and its projects shall reflect each member agency/organization. No one partner shall be promoted over any others. A success of any individual partner shall be considered a success of the collaboration.

Evaluation:

- Decide how it will be done to give each partner what it needs for its reporting system. This could be a total evaluation instrument and each group pulls what they need from it.
- What form will the evaluation take?
- All partners should be involved in drafting/reviewing the instrument to be sure information they need to report will be reflected.
- Who will be responsible for the evaluation?
- What is the time frame? The information should be timely so that it is available in accordance with agency/organization reporting deadlines.

Tips:

- Structured subgroups may help with limited interaction time between members of large groups .
- Raising questions versus stating one's opinions will help reduce disagreements.
- Improving communication and active listening during and between meetings – all need to be kept informed.

Examples of documenting collaborative outcomes:

- As a result of a collaboration focused on...(what happened, to how many, and what were some major results or quotes of participants)
- A collaboration of eight agencies, and four community organizations focused on the issue of providing...
- Three agencies joined to create a new program for....
- In a three county, community-supported effort....

Indications of potential "turf" battles:

- Group goals are never 100% compatible with goals of each partner involved. Be prepared to compromise or modify commitment to specific goals and to help other members adjust as necessary.
- Collaborators feel they will gain by working together or having access to an equal degree of power, cooperation continues. If one organization feels it has too much to lose by continued cooperation, it will defend its turf.
- One organization perceives another as a direct and regular competitor for resources that are not likely to be shared.
- Lack of knowledge or mistrust of the other organizations.
- One organization feels it does not have much in common with the proposed partners.
- Collaborator feels it would cost them too much in resources compared with the proposed benefit.
- A feeling that one partner will gain more resources than the other partners.
- The approach proposed to reach goals would be ineffective or counterproductive to other interests of the organization.
- Ownership of an activity or technique that another organization plans to use.
- Concern that the proposed collaboration would change how their organization is viewed by the public.

Remember, the point of collaborating is to achieve a result that is better for each partner than what they could achieve on their own.

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Agreement to Collaborate

1. The Collaboration will be called _____.

2. Members of the collaboration are:

Partner Name	Role of this partner	Resources Provided

3. Each partner shall provide current information regarding name, mailing address, phone, fax and email to the person indicated as the contact person.

4. Each member shall be responsible for keeping abreast of meeting dates, times and locations.

5. _____ will take the lead in seeing that timely notices are communicated to members via the manner which the group chooses (email, mail, phone, etc.).

6. Key topics to be covered by this Collaboration include:

7. Should disputes occur within this Collaboration, members shall (denote method of settling disputes) _____

8. New members shall be accepted via (vote, informal invitation, etc.)

9. Should a partner become unable or unwilling to serve as a contributing member of the Collaboration, (replaced by another member of his/her agency, the group will seek another resource)

10. The duration of the Collaboration will be (definite end date or yearly assessment basis)

11. The Collaboration shall determine a time line of our key actions and goals and determine the milestones/indicators of progress. The time line shall be reviewed at least quarterly and adjustments made as necessary.

12. Funding for the Collaboration will be furnished by (grants, each agency)

13. Any funding coming to the Collaboration shall reside in _____ with _____ serving as principal overseer and that funds are distributed per consensus of the collaborators.

14. _____ will serve as leader of the Collaboration.

15. Any funds remaining at dissolution of the Collaboration will be distributed according to the consensus of the active members at the time, or to _____
