

# Community Partnerships: Collaboration

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## **Outcomes:**

**Understand** the meaning and benefits of collaboration,

**Recognize** the stages and milestones of the collaboration process; and

**Assess** the needs for collaborative partnerships in their community

## **Key Concepts:**

The key concepts of this training packet that serve as a knowledge base for the skills needed to define the collaborative process include:

**Collaboration.** Collaboration is the most intense level of working together. It is a structure and a process for creating change. **A collaborative effort is driven by partners who agree to share information, activities, resources, influence, power, and decision-making authority to achieve common goals - goals that no single partner or program could achieve by acting alone.**

**Community Partnerships.** The Performance Standards require local Head Start programs to engage, plan, and work with other organizations to improve, maximize, and share services, staff, information, and funds. Unmet family needs, tragic events, or environmental changes, such as diminishing resources at a time of increased demand for services, often spark a call for action and the development of community partnerships.

**Benefits of Collaboration for Head Start Families.** Community-wide collaboration is essential to **increase family/child access** to needed supports and services, **reduce confusion** when assistance is needed from two or more agencies, and create environments where **children and families can learn to thrive**. Furthermore, collaboration involves and supports families in their efforts to **make the community safer or more responsive to child and family interests and needs.**

**Benefits of Collaboration for Local Head Start Programs and Staff.** In addition to helping families and children succeed, collaboration is beneficial to Head Start programs and staff. Community partnerships offer avenues for conducting community assessments and program planning, initiating program

self-assessments, managing resources, enhancing creativity in program design and service delivery, renewing staff energy and motivation, acquiring new viewpoints on complex issues and strategies for resolving them, reducing environmental risks, avoiding the duplication of services, and having a voice in how the community provides support and services.

**Organizational Levels of Collaboration. All Head Start staff have a potential role in the development of community partnerships.** Collaboration takes place at the governing and policy-making level within communities, at the management level among agencies, and at the direct-services level between providers as well as with the community at large.

### ***Background Information:***

Community partnerships are exciting and dynamic structures that develop from the realization that programs and people can share resources and achieve more by working together. Through commitment, a willingness to compromise, and careful planning, partners are capable of making significant changes in the community.

#### **Developmental process**

The formation of a collaborative is often a developmental process that begins with communication and networking. Program administrators, members of governing boards, managers, consumers, and/or direct service providers from different agencies come together to explore possibilities of working together. In this initial phase, partners exchange information and build rapport by sharing concerns, interests, and needs.

The next phase takes participants to coordination and cooperation, where information and activities are shared. Participants develop methods of working together that allow them to take advantage of each other's resources without substantially altering the way their programs operate or deliver services. For example, participants may decide to co-sponsor staff training events or health promotion campaigns. This phase usually does not require a changes in program budgets or policies, but may require a change in program procedures. When agency coordination and cooperation work well, the door to collaboration may open. Collaboration is different from cooperation and coordination in a significant way. **In an effort where collaboration take place, participants become partners and agree to share information, activities, and resources to achieve common goals.** For example, local Head Start programs and school districts can collaborate by jointly hiring therapists to ensure smooth and appropriate transitions for children with disabilities and their families. **Changes in the structure, policies, procedures, and budgets of the partners'**

programs are often necessary to carry out the goals of a collaborative effort.

### Assessing Head Start's Readiness for Community Partnerships

Prior to engaging in a collaborative, Head Start programs must assess their readiness for participation in a community partnership. Some questions to help staff explore the possibilities, benefits, and challenges of community partnership, include:

In your work with families, do you see any need to change the service system or conditions in the community? Do you see any need for a new service, program, or resources?

What are your ideas for building a community partnership?

How would the projected partnership benefit Head Start children and families?

What challenges do you expect in developing, or being part of, a community partnership?

#### 1.1 The formation of a collaborative is often a developmental process that begins with

- a. a request from a family.
- b. a need to meet federal guidelines related to collaboration.
- c. communications and networking.
- d. a management directive to expand services.

#### 1.2 In a collaborative, participants develop methods of working together that allow them to

- a. take advantage of each other's resources.
- b. diversify family contacts.
- c. control how much another agency or group is getting from you.
- d. meet federal guidelines.

### 1.3 In order to form a collaborative it may sometimes become necessary to change

- a. structure, procedures and budgets, but not policies.
- b. attitudes about child and family services.
- c. structure, procedures, budgets, and policies.
- d. agency need to maintain some jobs or services.

### Stages and Milestones

Building a community partnership is hard work and demands a lot of patience. Collaborations move through four stages. Each stage has a set of milestones or benchmarks that allow collaborative partners know they are making progress. However, each partnership is unique, going through the stages and meeting the benchmarks in its own way and at its own speed.

#### Stage One: Getting Together

In this stage, a small group comes together to explore how to address and issue or need of mutual concern. Sometimes an event in the community, such as clothing a public housing complex or a child's tragic death, brings people together. **More typically, people come together due to shared frustrations over deteriorating neighborhood conditions or unmet service needs.** Next, the group identifies and invites other community representatives who may have a stake in the same issue. In addition, initial ground rules for working together are also explored in this stage.

#### Stage Two: Building Trust and Ownership

Once potential partners are identified, attention turns to **building trust and ownership** by engaging partners, **developing a base of common knowledge**, and **creating a shared vision** of what needs to change. At this point, group members make a joint commitment to become partners and collaborate. They exchange information - as well as views on the issue or need - that brought them together. In addition, partners must **revisit and revise the basic ground rules for working together** and explore the resources needed for collaborative planning.

#### Stage Three: Developing a Strategic Plan

In this stage, partners **develop a mission statement** and **conduct an assessment** to determine whether the collaborative has the ability to accomplish its mission. This assessment involves: 1) obtaining more information relevant to

the issue (e.g., political climate, other initiatives); and 2) identifying the strengths, needs, opportunities, and challenges of the collaboration.

If, after the assessment, the partners feel the collaborative has potential to succeed, they **establish goals**. If substantial discrepancies exist between the goals and the potential to achieve them, partners must reevaluate and rework them. This stage also involves **developing strategies for achieving the goals** by examining the various routes, analyzing the cost and benefits of each, and selecting the strategies that are most likely to work.

#### Stage Four: Taking Action

In this stage, partners begin to implement the strategies that define their strategic plan. Sometimes program policies and procedures need to be revised or modified in order to support the plan developed by the collaborative. Thus, if they are not already involved, partners must bring program administrators and members of governing bodies and policy groups who have policy-making authority to the table. **Before going full scale with the initiative, partners may decide to implement a pilot project and assess the results.**

**Ongoing evaluation that helps partners monitor their work, making mid-course corrections, and measuring the results is an integral part of the collaborative process.** The programmed learning packet *Practicing the Collaborative Effort*, as well as other training packets in the series *Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community*, offer guidance on evaluation. **Finally, throughout all the stages, taking the time to reflect on and celebrate achievements - no matter how small - brings renewed energy and commitment the partners.**

#### 2.1 In stage one, getting together, it is important for groups with a mutual concern to

- a. decide exactly what they can do together.
- b. state clearly the limitations each group is working within.
- c. decide who will be in charge.
- d. identify and and invite others who may have a stake in the same issue.

#### 2.2 In stage two, building trust and ownership, it is important that the groups involved

- a. share information.
- b. invite others to join the session.
- c. decide who will be in charge.
- d. make a positive commitment to a course of action.

**2.3 In stage three, developing a strategic plan, it is important for the partners to**

- a. develop a mission statement and conduct an assessment of ability to accomplish this.
- b. decide who will be in charge.
- c. structure, procedures, budgets, and policies.
- d. sign contracts.

**2.4 In stage four, taking action, it is important for the partners to**

- a. establish policies and procedures (if necessary) to accomplish the strategic plans.
  - b. decide who will be in charge.
  - c. structure, procedures, budgets, and policies.
  - d. develop a mission statement and conduct an assessment of ability to accomplish this.
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