

## CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FACTSHEET

### Building Effective Collaborations

Collaborations are partnerships between community-based organizations that share (1) a common goal; (2) a common vision for how to achieve that goal; and (3) the total workload necessary to achieve that goal.

The success of community-based work depends on the quality of relationships among community members. *Collaborations*—whether formal (e.g. contractual, grant-related, etc.) or informal—are indispensable to the success and sustainability of your community-based organization. With collaborators, your organization’s impact can be amplified, your community’s resources expanded, and your staff’s workload lessened. Without collaborators, outside organizations may become impediments to program goal achievement, or worse yet, antagonistic critics of your organization and staff.



#### ***Collaborations Require Leadership!***

- Don't lose sight of your community concerns.
- Be personally committed and inspire commitment in others.
- Engage others and invite participation.
- Stimulate conversation and respect others' ideas.
- Facilitate progress and keep the project on task, timeline, and budget.
- Resolve conflicts with diplomacy and treat everyone with respect.
- Be trustworthy, patient, and hopeful.

**Tip:** Constructive conflict can be helpful for collaborations — but make sure you have a skilled facilitator to make the meeting productive.

#### **Why not go it alone? The advantages of collaborations**

Collaborations will bring your community and your organization resources.

- ***Funding:*** Sometimes partners will bring new funding to a project, which will strengthen your ability to address community concerns. Funders also value collaborative efforts and may be more inclined to support a project with multiple partners.
- ***In-kind:*** This may include office and meeting space, copying, and supplies.
- ***Knowledge and Information:*** Partners may have information and data about the issue, or they may have specialized knowledge based on previous work on the issue.
- ***Skills:*** Some partners are experts in a particular field, such as health or transportation, while African Community Based Organizations (ACBOs) tend to have expertise in accessing African immigrant communities in linguistically and culturally appropriate ways.
- ***Credibility:*** ACBOs bring credibility with the African-born community to new collaborations. But other partners may have credibility with public officials or the general public that ACBOs need.

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### How to identify the right partners for your collaboration

Participation from community members and leaders is vital, otherwise your collaboration will lack credibility. Depending on the issue, consider including businesses, policy makers, faith-based leaders, youth, and older persons in addition to other social service organizations. Develop a master list and begin to assess each potential partner's interests. Don't forget to explore your existing relationships with other organizations. Once you have a list of potential partners, develop a recruitment plan for each. Concisely describe to these possible partners what the collaboration intends to do and why. Use inclusive language that carries a positive, motivated tone. Let them see your vision for the future and be outcome oriented.



**Tip:** Promote multiple contacts at your organization — this type of communication evidences and promotes trust between partners and generates more comprehensive attention to the goal.

### How to implement the collaboration and create community change

1. **Clarify goals and agree to a workplan:** Every partner must understand the goals or results expected, and they must work together to create and agree upon a workplan with specific tasks, task holders, and a timeline. If the goals or workplan seem unrealistic or unsatisfactory to any partner, further discussion is necessary. Full commitment from all partners is essential!
2. **Share responsibilities:** Your workplan should clearly state which partners are responsible for which tasks and when they should be completed. Your organization should not take on an unrealistically large amount of the work, nor should your organization give all the work to other partners. Find balance.
3. **Communicate:** Joining a collaboration is truly organizational “relationship building.” Share decision making. Be straightforward, honest, and realistic. Be clear about roles. Follow through on commitments.
4. **Learn:** Collaborations are opportunities to learn—from other organizations’ perspectives, approaches to problem-solving, and unique capabilities. You will also become aware of your own organization’s strengths and weaknesses.

### Skills for Collaborations

Each coalition requires three types of skills to make collaborations effective:

- ★ **Technical/Functional:** The expertise necessary to address the problem
- ★ **Problem Solving:** The ability to determine the best approach to resolving the problem
- ★ **Interpersonal:** The ability to relate to other partners with diplomacy and respect

Sometimes all partners possess all three skills, but often partners vary in skills and expertise.

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### Collaboration examples for ACBOs

- A community health center to increase access to non-emergency healthcare
- An arts non profit to offer African children a safe space for learning after school
- The police department to provide training on how to best serve recently resettled refugees
- A community center and transportation agency to connect African elders to group activities

A collaboration is more than a group of people with a shared goal. **Successful collaborations** work as teams toward inspiring a vision of progress; one partner's actions are interdependent with those of other partners. Collaborating partners understand the work to be performed, they complete the job, and the community supports the product and reaps the benefit.

### *Potential Collaboration Problems*

Many collaborations experience problems and conflict. But, it is a normal and important part of the collaboration! Below are some examples of collaboration shortcomings your organization might face:

- ◆ Partners losing motivation from a lack of individual recognition
- ◆ More time needed for a particular objective than previously thought — this could be due to a young collaboration needing time to develop
- ◆ Collaboration success may depend on the work of the least skilled partner
- ◆ Decision making could take more time than allotted if partners disagree



**Tip:** All partners should come to the table as equals in terms of power, respect, and importance. Equality is necessary for both discussion among partners and decision-making authority regarding planning and task fulfillment.

### Sources:

- 'How to Partner with Local Community Organizations' *Yes we can!* Series. W.K. Kellogg Foundation, online at [http://www.wkkf.org/DesktopModules/WKF.00\\_DmaSupportViewDoc.aspx?LanguageID=0&CID=5&ListID=28&ItemID=52991&fld=PDFFile](http://www.wkkf.org/DesktopModules/WKF.00_DmaSupportViewDoc.aspx?LanguageID=0&CID=5&ListID=28&ItemID=52991&fld=PDFFile).
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## GOOD PRACTICES TOOL: IDENTIFYING NEW PARTNERS WORKSHEET

### In Summary

Strong collaborations require partners that: 1) share a common goal; 2) agree to a common vision for how to achieve that goal; and 3) share the work necessary to reach the goal. Collaborations can be used to address issues, resolve problems, and plan an initiative or event.

Selecting the right partners for your collaboration is not an easy task. Your collaboration needs three types of skills; make sure that among all your partners that you have all three skills: 1) Technical skills to assess the issue or activity; 2) Problem solving skills to determine the best approach for resolving the problem or executing the task; and 3) Interpersonal skills to relate to other partners with diplomacy and respect.

The following tool will help you to see the assets of potential partners and compare these potential partners with one another:

Potential Partner Organization	Organization 1	Organization 2	Organization 3
Resources or knowledge they might provide			
Why they might partner			
Who we know at this organization			
Who will contact them			
Contact Information			

For more information, contact the Center for African Refugees and Immigrants (CARI)

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