

Developing a Plan to Sustain Collaborations

Once you have established a collaborative partnership with a health care organization (HCO), it is important to develop a comprehensive plan to sustain the collaboration. Similar to a strategic plan, the sustainability plan should articulate the vision and common goals of the collaboration. As a foundation, the plan should describe the envisioned outcomes of the collaboration and the strategies that will be implemented to achieve those outcomes. To develop your sustainability plan, here are some key activities to perform during the planning process to ensure a successful sustainable collaboration.

Attain a Shared Vision of Sustainability

When developing the sustainability plan, it is important that each partner involved in the collaboration has a shared understanding of sustainability.¹ According to Flicker, McGranaghan, and Palermo (2006), “it is important for a partnership to come to a common understanding of what sustainability means for the partnership, and what criteria will be used to decide what, and if, the partnership or its components should be sustained” (Section 7.2).¹

Develop an Interagency Collaboration Agreement

Each organization participating in the collaboration should work together to develop a written agreement that communicates the purpose of the partnership and the basic guidelines regarding participation; including roles and responsibilities, time commitment, expected level of contribution, and replacement of members.² Additionally, the written agreements should contain information regarding the sharing of staff and resources, conflict resolution processes, confidentiality policies, and terms of termination.³ A written agreement ensures that all of the terms of your collaboration are documented and approved by each participant. This increases the likelihood that the organization will sustain the partnership.³

Establish Communication Protocols

Effective communication is an integral component of sustainable collaborations. To be successful, it is important to establish protocols and strategies for communicating internally, within the home organization and interagency collaboration, and externally with the broader community.² A comprehensive communication strategy will include protocols regarding:

1. **Methods of Communication.** How should partners within the collaboration communicate? Who will be responsible for coordinating communication activities within the collaboration? What mechanisms will be used to share information? How often should partners communicate? What information should be communicated to leaders within the home organization regarding the collaboration? Who will be the designated spokesperson in the collaboration?
2. **Standardization of Language.** Ensure clear and effective communication through the use of standard language. Each partner should agree to use language that is acceptable and understood by all parties involved in the collaboration.²

Create an Evaluation Plan

Each partner organization should work together to establish an evaluation plan. The plan should describe how you will evaluate the collaboration to determine its effectiveness and impact. It should include the measures and methods you will use to assess the collaboration’s processes and outcomes. Additionally, the plan should describe how you intend to utilize and disseminate the evaluation results to improve and make decisions regarding the collaboration.

Sources:

1. Flicker S., McGranaghan R., and Palermo A.G. Unit 7: Unpacking Sustainability in CBPR Partnerships. In: The Examining Community-Institutional Partnerships for Prevention Research Group. *Developing and Sustaining Community-Based Participatory Research Partnerships: A Skill-Building Curriculum*. 2006. www.cbprcurriculum.info. 2. Social Entrepreneurs, Inc. “Building and Sustaining Effective Collaborations.” Research Brief. <http://alliancefornevedanonprofits.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Research-Brief-Building-and-Sustaining-Collaborations.pdf>. 3. Winer, M. & Ray, K. 1994. “Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey.” St. Paul, MN: Fieldstone Alliance