



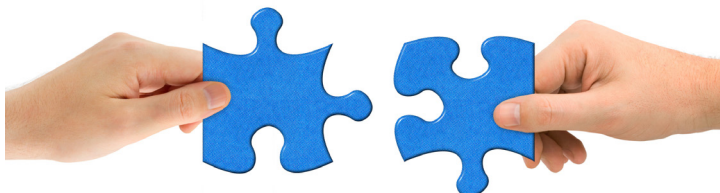
Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve results they are more likely to achieve together than alone. ¹

Introduction

Association of State Public Health Nutritionists' (ASPHN) members are routinely asked to participate in collaborative efforts. Collaborative work doesn't just happen, based upon good will and expectations; it requires a set of skills, knowledge and practices to be effective. This primer provides an overview of collaboration principles, lists factors that affect successful collaboration, provides an example of ASPHN's recent experiences in this area and offers a resource for more information.

Defining Collaboration

The word collaboration is used in different ways making it necessary to check for common understanding. Collaboration may be used as a synonym for "working together." The term may indicate a process or it might refer to a highly integrated method of achieving a goal. Collaboration is generally seen as a cooperative way that two or more entities work together towards a shared goal.² Collaboration sets the stage for coalition development and collaborative governance, both important processes in which many public health nutritionists are involved.



Why Collaborate?

There are a number of excellent reasons for groups to work together to achieve common goals. They include:

- Complex problems require complex solutions and typically are beyond the scope of one group.
- Working with others brings greater knowledge, ideas, skills and resources, allowing more to be done by maximizing talent and assets.
- To eliminate waste, reduce duplication of effort and bring greater success with limited resources.
- Funders expect it.
- It may allow work to continue on agency goals while accommodating downsizing and reduced funding.

Levels of Collaboration

Since the word collaboration can be misunderstood, it is valuable to review some of the theory in this area. A commonly used collaboration framework is Hogue’s³ Levels of Community Linkage Model. This model describes five levels of collaboration:

- 1) networking,
- 2) cooperation or alliance,
- 3) coordination or partnership,
- 4) coalition, and
- 5) collaboration.



According to this model, the collaboration process exists across a continuum with the stages differing based upon purpose, how decisions are made and the type of leadership. As effective partnerships evolve they may move from autonomy to interdependence, individual group decision making to joint decision making, enhanced communication and systems integration.



The following table summarizes the relationship characteristics at the five levels of collaborations. To avoid confusion and even failure, it is important for partners to be clear about how they wish to work together. By reviewing this information with potential partners, a group can decide at what level of the collaborative scale they wish to work and have a common understanding of the characteristics of that level.

Levels of Collaboration Scale Summary ⁴					
STAGES	NETWORKING 1	COOPERATION 2	COORDINATION 3	COALITION 4	COLLABORATION 5
RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	Aware of organization	Provide information to each other	Share information and resources	Share ideas	Members belong to one system
	Loosely defined roles	Somewhat defined roles	Defined roles	Share resources	
	Little communication	Formal communication	Frequent communication	Frequent and prioritized communication	Frequent communication characterized by mutual trust
	All decisions are made independently	All decisions are made independently	Some shared decision making	All members have a vote in decision making	Consensus is reached on all decisions



Planning for a Collaborative Effort

Once a group knows at what level of collaboration scale they wish to work, the stage is set for important planning around purpose, structure and process. The following table lists the choices that partners need to discuss and decisions they need to make regarding purpose, structure and process of the joint effort by the level of collaboration. Again the group can use this information to come to common understanding about what they will do and how they will do it. This will help reduce misunderstandings and enhance the chances of working together successfully.

Community Linkages — Choices and Decisions ⁵

	NETWORKING	COOPERATION	COORDINATION	COALITION	COLLABORATION
PURPOSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialog and common understanding Clearinghouse for information Create base of support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Match needs and provide coordination Limit duplication of services Ensure tasks are done 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share resources to address common issues Merge resource base to create something new 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share ideas and be willing to pull resources from existing systems Develop commitment for a minimum of three years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accomplish shared vision and impact benchmarks Build interdependent system to address issues and opportunities
STRUCTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loose/flexible link Roles loosely defined Community action is primary link among members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central body of people as communication hub Semi-formal links Roles somewhat defined Links are advisory Group leverages/raises money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central body of people consists of decision makers Roles defined Links formalized Group develops new resources and joint budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All members involved in decision making Roles and time defined Links formal with written agreement Group develops new resources and joint budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus used in shared decision making Roles, time and evaluation formalized Links are formal and written in work assignments
PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low key leadership Minimal decision making Little conflict Informal communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitative leaders Complex decision making Some conflict Formal communications within the central group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Autonomous leadership but focus in on issue Group decision making in central and subgroups Communication is frequent and clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared leadership Decision making formal with all members Communication is common and prioritized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership high, trust level high, productivity level high Ideas and decisions equally shared Highly developed communication



Factors Influencing Successful Collaborations

A number of factors support successful collaborations. Paying attention to these elements will greatly increase the likelihood of a successful effort. Once the group is clear about what they wish to accomplish and how they will interact, the next stage is to engage in a comprehensive planning process resulting in an understanding of the group’s goals, objectives, activities, responsibilities and evaluation measures. However, good planning alone will not ensure a successful collaboration. Effective communication is necessary, as is mutual trust and respect among the partners. Additionally, there are other factors within the environment that may be harder to manage, such as a favorable political climate and sufficient resources.

Mattessich and colleagues ⁶ have identified six key categories comprised of 20 factors that influence a successful collaboration. ⁷ They are:

- 1. Environment** — Is there a favorable political climate; is there a history of cooperation in the community?
- 2. Membership Characteristics** — Is there mutual respect and trust among members; are the right people involved; does the purpose serve all; is there flexibility among members?
- 3. Process and Structure** — Do participants have clear roles? Has the group developed policies and procedures? Do all members have a stake in the outcomes? Is the collaboration able to adapt?
- 4. Communication** — Is there an established communication plan; is communication clear?
- 5. Purpose** — Is there a shared vision; are the goals obtainable?
- 6. Resources** — Are there sufficient funds, staff, skilled leadership?



Summary

Collaborative efforts are a good way to accomplish complicated tasks. This primer offers a brief introduction to factors that influence effective collaboration. For more information and resources on collaboration, go to the ASPHN collaboration webpage at www.asphn.org.

¹ The Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey 2nd Edition. Ray Winer, Karen Ray. (2012) Fieldstone Alliance Publications, St. Paul, MN

² University of Kansas, School Program Evaluation and Research. Levels of Collaboration scale. Retrieved 12/12 <http://www.keccs.org/resources.shtml>

³ Hogue, T. (1993). Community-based collaboration: Community wellness multiplied. Bend, OR: Chandler Center for Community Leadership

⁴ Frey, B.B., Lohmeier, J.H., Lee, S.W., & Tollefson, N. (2006). Measuring collaboration among grant partners. American Journal of Evaluation, 27, 3, 383-392. Pg 387. Retrieved 12/12 http://onthepoint.smartsimple.biz/files/237865/f95430/Frey__2006_Measuring_Collaboration_Among_Grant_Partners.pdf

⁵ National Network for Collaboration. Collaboration Framework-Addressing Community Capacity. (1995) Retrieved 12/12 http://www.uvm.edu/extension/community/pdfs/collaboration_framework.pdf

⁶ Collaboration: What Makes It Work, Paul Mattessich, PhD, Marta Murray-Close, BA, & Barbara Monsey, MPH. (2001) Fieldstone Alliance Publications, St. Paul, MN. Retrieved 12/12 http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/client/articles/Article-4_Key_Collab_Success.cfm

⁷ USDHHS, Office of Population Affairs. Adolescent Family Life Self Directed Modules. Conclusion. Retrieved 12/12 http://www.hhs.gov/opa/familylife/tech_assistance/etraining/collaboration_sustainability/conclusion/index.html#1

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ASPHN's Mini Learning Collaboration Project Overview

ASPHN leadership continues to explore what opportunities will assist members in being more effective at working on collaborative efforts within their states. The project described below and the accompanying lessons learned are about effective collaboration.

The ASPHN Maternal and Child Health Nutrition Council recognized a national opportunity for collaboration. Council leadership identified that if members were better able to work across funding streams and state agencies, they would be in a stronger position to improve the nutritional wellbeing of women, children and families.

To assist in this effort, ASPHN initiated a competitive funding opportunity for members. The goal was to identify how states could best work across several federal funding streams (Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal Child Health Bureau; United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services; and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity) and state agencies to improve the nutritional wellbeing of the maternal and child health population. MCHB provided funding for the Mini Learning Collaboration Project. Funded states received a \$5,000 stipend, technical assistance, and used the MCHB *Blueprint to Improve Nutrition and Physical Activity* to shape their project.

ASPHN selected Kansas and Oregon to carry out the project. Both states convened a team composed of state MCH, WIC, Child Nutrition and CDC funded staff. Each team developed a project on a self-selected topic that affected more than one state agency and included multiple federally funded programs. Kansas chose to organize and sponsor a summit for multiple agencies highlighting current nutrition initiatives and to support cross-program networking. Oregon supported the development of a shared meals project through the Nutrition Council of Oregon.

Also as part of this effort, ASPHN convened an advisory group comprised of members and national partners representing the National WIC Association, Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs, National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center, the Maternal and Child Health/Title V; USDA, Food and Nutrition Services; and CDC, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity, and Obesity. In June 2011, the group discussed how to successfully work across multiple funding streams. This information became part of the technical assistance provided to the state teams. In summer 2012, the ASPHN Mini Learning Collaborative Advisory Group met again and included Oregon and Kansas staff. The group considered how federal and state agencies could support collaborative efforts in the current austere funding climate. From that information and the results of



the mini collaborative projects in Kansas and Oregon, the advisory group outlined the following lessons learned.

ASPHN Lessons Learned About Effective Collaboration

- It is necessary to have intent, trust, time and support if collaborations are to be a success.
- All partners must agree on what is meant by collaboration and expectations regarding purpose, structure and process.
- A strong planning process is an essential component.
- A number of internal and external factors will influence success.
- Specific knowledge and skills are needed to carry out successful collaborations.
- Public health nutritionists typically have the planning skills and the professional relationships to work with partners in other federally funded nutrition programs.



Factors Needed for an Effective Collaborative Process Checklist			
FACTOR	YES	PARTIAL	NO
Factors to Consider in the Development Stage of the Project			
1. There is sufficient reason to collaborate.			
2. The results achieved working together will exceed those achieved alone.			
3. All partners will benefit from this work.			
4. Sufficient resources are available.			
5. Partners agree upon the criteria for ending the project (e.g. goals are accomplished or partners decide the effort is unsustainable)			
Factors to Consider When Initiating the Project			
1. The right partners are involved.			
2. Partners agree upon what level of collaborative relationship they want (networking, cooperation, coordination, coalition or collaboration).			
3. Partners are clear and agree about expected purpose, structure and process.			
4. The expectations of the collaboration are well-defined (outcomes, roles, timeframes).			
5. Someone is assigned to coordinate the effort.			
6. Funders support the project.			
7. Decision-makers are involved or are kept informed about the project.			
Factors to Consider in the Early Stages of the Project			
1. A facilitator is available to assist with initial project planning.			
2. Realistic goals are established.			
3. Attainable objectives are established.			
4. A detailed workplan is in place.			
5. A communications plan is in place.			
6. An evaluation plan is in place.			
Factors for Ongoing Consideration			
1. Partners receive training about collaborations and other topics.			



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