Resource Guide 1: Establishing and Maintaining Effective Partnerships

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A Division of the Seattle Indian Health Board

There are many benefits of developing, nurturing and working in partnerships to achieve a common goal. Partnerships can maximize resources, not only financial, but also knowledge, skills, and ideas, without duplicating efforts. This introduction to partnerships provides guidance for engaging in mutually beneficial collaborations.

Characteristics of Successful Partnerships

Every partnership is different, but the characteristics below are commonly cited in literature as improving the process and outcomes of collaborations. [1-10]

- A common vision and collective commitment
- Mutual trust and respect
- Risks, resources and rewards are shared jointly
- Responsibility, authority, and accountability are mutual, with clearly defined expectations and roles
- Members build upon each partner's skills and assets
- Opportunities for capacity building through learning exchanges
- Openness to learning and teaching opportunities
- Ground rules that create a safe space to address challenges
- Acknowledgement of the differences between the partners
- Flexibility

It takes time to build trust. Some steps you can take to build trust include frequent communication; follow through on commitments and; presence at meetings or events. You may want to try small projects together first to see if the relationship works well before committing to a larger project. Like any relationship, collaboration is hard work. It is important that group norms encourage communication and team problem solving to address challenges as they arise. It may be tempting to pull out of a partnership when disagreements occur, however successfully navigating rough patches can strengthen relations.

Members of a partnership may have a shared vision but that does not mean they have shared needs. An academic institution may need a formal publication to result from the partnership whereas a community partner may need increased resources to provide an intervention. Differing agendas should be acknowledged so that they can be supported by the partnership

Considerations when establishing a partnership [5,11]

Below are some of the critical questions organizations should consider when deciding whether to enter a new partnership.

- How does this build on or dovetail with current structures/programs?
- Is the topic addressed a priority to your organization and community?
- How will your patients and organization benefit?
- What are the costs and risks?
- What will be your agency's role?
- What will happen when the partnership or project ends? What is the plan for sustainability if the results of the partnership or project show positive results for the community?

The following questions are specific to research projects.

- What will happen to the information and/or data collected?
- How flexible is the research plan to modifications in response to community and agency needs?
- How will the results be returned to the community?

Citations and Additional Resources on Partnership and Collaboration

[1] Baker EA et al. (1999). Principles of practice for academic/practice/community research partnerships. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine,* 16(3S), 86-93.

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[4] Gust S & Jordan C. (2006). *The Community Impact Statement: A tool for creating healthy partnerships*. Minneapolis, MN. Retrieved from http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/CIS%20Process%20Statement.pdf.

[5] Himmelman A. (2002) *Collaboration for a Change: Definitions, decision-making models, roles and collaboration process guide*. Minneapolis, MN. Retrieved from http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/4achange.pdf.

[6] Lowe J, Riggs C & Henson J. (2011) Principles for establishing trust when developing a substance abuse intervention with a Native American community. *Creative Nursing*, 17(2), 68-73.

[7] Minkler M & Wallerstein N. (2002). *Community-Based Participatory Research for Health*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Publishers.

[8] Minkler M. (2005). Community-based research partnerships: challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Urban Health,* 82(2S2), ii3-12.

[9] Plowfield LA, Wheeler EC & Raymond JE. (2005). Time, tact, talent and trust: essesntial ingredients of effective academic-community partnerships. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 26(4), 217-220.

[10] Seifer SD (2007) Walking the talk: Achieving the promise of authentic partnerships. *Partnership Prespectives,* 4(1), 1-12.

[11] Dissemination and Implementation Research Workshop. June 10, 2011 Seattle, WA.
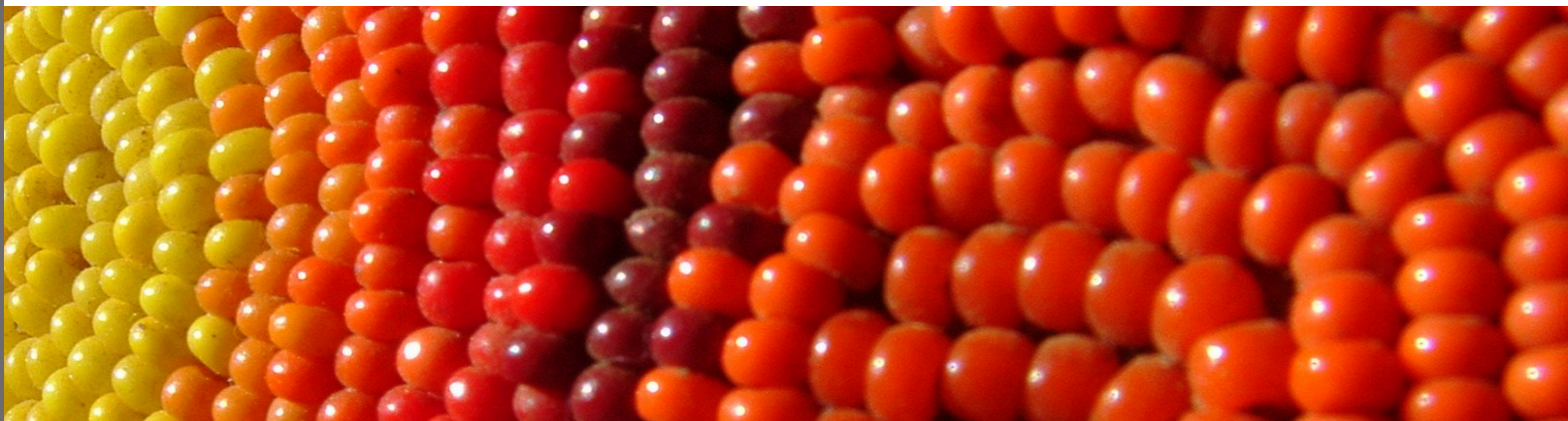
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We welcome your feedback, questions, thoughts and suggestions.

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