



Improving Your Chances for Success in Partnerships

The key to success in engaging other organizations and agencies in a collaborative effort is in how you approach the collaboration both in terms of your actions and your attitude.

Actions That Support Collaboration

1. Assign staff to the effort who have the appropriate authority and responsibility to act on behalf of the agency for this effort.
2. Create a common vision for what you are trying to achieve, including goals and results.
3. Make sure that roles and responsibilities are clear and appropriate for each organization.
4. Recognize the mandates, capacity and limits of each partnering organization.
5. Create a clear communication plan that includes both formal and informal channels. Phone calls can avoid a lot of misunderstandings and are more effective than e-mail, especially if there is a concern or question.
6. Share information openly and in a timely manner—keep partners up to date on changes that will affect the effort.

Attitudes That Support Collaboration

- **Trust.** The core of any successful relationship is trust. Partners in an effort need to know that they can rely on each other to follow through on commitments and that they will remain committed to the vision and goals of the effort.
- **Mutual respect for skills and knowledge.** One advantage of collaborating in any effort is that each partner brings to the effort a variety of skills and knowledge. It's important that partners acknowledge and plan to use the range of skills and knowledge available from the various organizations and agencies.
- **Treat your partners as partners.** Governmental agencies have many contracts with businesses and other organizations. Typically the relationship is one of a contractual nature with a monitoring and reporting focus. While monitoring and reporting are equally important in a collaborative relationship or partnership, they are not the focus of the joint work. In a collaboration, each agency or organization is focused on the outcome of the endeavor and on working in a collegial manner to accomplish the established goals and objectives.
- **Flexibility.** Keeping an open mind, listening to the ideas of others and being willing to make changes when plans are not working are all important elements of being flexible and achieving the best results.

- **Ability to disagree with respect.** In planning and carrying out any collaborative effort, there will be many ideas and perspectives about how best to achieve the goals. It's not necessary for everyone to agree on everything but it is important that when there is disagreement the partners are able to work through it with respect.
- **Understanding the different resources, mandates and restrictions of each partnering organization.** Take time to understand each of the partnering entities. Often partners make assumptions about what other partners can do, and this can lead to misunderstanding.