

Growing Your Collaboration: Preparing for Recruitment

Very few collaborations happen spontaneously. More often, practitioners need to actively persuade, or *recruit*, potential partners to work with them. Although recruitment can be as simple as placing a phone call or sending an email, successful recruitment takes time and intentionality if you are looking to build a more long-term, sustainable collaboration.

Successful recruitment is not unlike growing a garden. Before you begin planting seeds, you must first find a viable plot of earth and spend time tilling the soil to prepare it for a productive growing season. Similarly, effective recruitment efforts must begin by taking time to carefully research and build trust with a potential partner. That way, when you finally *plant the seed*—or ask a potential partner to collaborate—you'll get the “yes” you hope to hear.

This tool presents the four phases of successful recruitment, accompanied by tips to ensure that your collaboration can grow just like a garden (think of the tips as fertilizer).

Phase 1: Do Your Homework

Before reaching out, learn everything you can about your potential partner. Find out “who’s who” in the organization, with whom they currently partner, whom they serve, and what their history has been addressing substance use and misuse or related behaviors. The more you know about your potential partner, the more likely you will be to reach out to the right person and make a case for collaboration that resonates with your partner’s priorities and experiences.

Tips:

- Be judicious about with whom you connect first. Start with someone who can help you get the lay of the land, who has decision-making authority, or who has positive experiences collaborating in the past. These individuals may not always be a part of the organization’s formal leadership, but they may be influential, nonetheless.
- Review the organization’s past media presence (including publications, mentions in news, social

media presence). This can help you figure out which issues matters most to them and who their key players are. Has the organization recently experienced a change in leadership? Has the group expressed a need that your collaboration could address? Gathering this information will help you later on when you're ready to craft your pitch.

Phase 2: Establish a Relationship

People are more likely to work with people they know and trust. Plus, collaborations built on existing relationships are more likely to be sustained over time. So, take the time to build a relationship before moving in for the “ask.” Attend meetings or events hosted by your partner-of-interest. Include them on your mailing lists. Whenever you can, make a personal connection. Every effort that you make toward building a relationship will take you a baby step closer to getting the “yes” commitment you want.

Tips:

- Find a mutual contact who can introduce you to the person with whom you want to connect.
- “Break bread” with your potential partner by asking him to coffee or lunch.
- Connect with your potential partner’s organization on social media, and share or retweet the organization’s posts.
- Ask if you can begin attending meetings at your potential partner’s organization, or invite them to attend yours.

Phase 3: Develop Your Elevator Pitch

Before you start ringing any doorbells, it’s important to put together a winning “pitch”—that is, a short, convincing message that clearly describes what you want from your potential partner, and how you will both benefit from the collaboration. Will working together provide the partner with access to needed resources? Help access hard-to-reach populations? Prevent duplication of efforts? Your pitch is where you paint a picture of why collaboration is the way to go.

Tips:

- Be concrete. What will collaboration look like? What exactly will you want your partner to do upon saying “yes”?
- Remember that one size does not fit all when it comes to making a pitch. Your reasons for collaborating with one partner will not be the same as your reasons for partnering with another, nor will their reasons for wanting to partner with you. The more customized your pitch, the more likely it will be to resonate with the listener and elicit your desired response.

Phase 4: Choose a Delivery Approach

When it finally comes time to make “the ask”—that is, to reach out and ask your potential partner to *do* something, how will you do so? Send an email? Pick up the phone? Set up a meeting? When choosing an approach, consider your existing relationship with the person and what you know about their communication style. How well do you know them? How busy are they? Are they impossible to reach by phone? Do they prefer to see things in writing before talking them through? Use what you know about the person to select the “best fit” approach.

Tips:

- Although face-to-face meetings are a nice way to add a personal touch, calling or writing potential partners can be effective if you are short on time or need to engage a number of partners.
- Consider using a combination of delivery methods. For example, begin by providing background information on your organization via email, then follow up with an in-person meeting.