

Understanding the Basics

Levels of Collaboration

There are many different ways for stakeholders to work together. Collaboration between partners can range from informal (e.g., two agencies sharing information) to much more organized (e.g., multiple organizations working closely to achieve a shared vision).

The following chart describes four levels of collaboration: networking, cooperation, coordination, and full collaboration. We suggest using the chart to determine your current level of involvement with a partner, as well as options for deepening this relationship over time. You can also use the chart to explore different options for collaborating with new partners. Please note that no single type of collaboration is “better” than another. The best type is the one that is the best fit, given what you and your partners hope to achieve.

	Networking	Cooperation	Coordination	Full Collaboration
What is it?	Partners share information and talk with one another for their mutual benefit.	Partners support one another’s prevention activities but have no formal agreement in place.	Partners are engaged in mutual projects and initiatives, modifying their own activities to benefit the whole.	With a formal agreement in place, partners work toward developing enhanced capacity to achieve a shared vision.
Key Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Loosely defined roles ▪ Loose/flexible relationships ▪ Informal communication ▪ Minimal decision-making ▪ No risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Somewhat defined roles ▪ Informal and supportive relationships ▪ More frequent communication ▪ Limited decision-making ▪ Little to no risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Defined roles ▪ Formalized links, but each group retains autonomy ▪ Regular communication ▪ Shared decision-making around joint work ▪ Low to moderate risk ▪ Share some resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Formalized roles ▪ Formal links, which are written in an agreement ▪ Frequent communication ▪ Equally shared ideas and decision-making ▪ High risk but also high trust ▪ Pooled resources

	Networking	Cooperation	Coordination	Full Collaboration
What Does It Look Like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners share what they are doing to address common community issues at interagency meetings. Partners discuss existing programs, activities, or services with other organizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners publicize one another's programs and services. Partners write letters of support for one another's grant applications. Partners co-sponsor trainings or professional development activities. Partners exchange resources, such as technology expertise or meeting space. Partners attend one another's meetings and events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners serve together on event planning committees and community boards. Partners implement programs and services together. Partners care about the same issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners sign a memorandum of understanding with each other. Partners develop common data collection systems. Partners participate in joint fundraising efforts. Partners pool fiscal or human resources. Partners create common workforce training systems.

Reference

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.