

THE COMMUNITY-BASED COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

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This framework is predicated on the assumption that collaboration will be based on equal opportunity for members of a committee, coalition or group to share in the: planning, information, work, problem-solving, decision-making, responsibility, power, and benefits of their endeavour. This framework focuses on *prospectively* developing collaborative partnership agreements that ensure full participation and accessibility, determines participants' strengths and constraints, defines participants' roles and responsibilities, defines decision-making and conflict resolution strategies, describes the benefits to participation, and allows the development of appropriate time lines and budgets which support full participation.

INITIATING PARTICIPATION

The initial meeting between the members should set the stage for: discussing the project and the goals of each stakeholder, defining individual and common interests, defining the potential gains and benefits, discussing potential commitment level and resources, and the type of partnership which might adapt to these parameters.

- Contact the potential partner to request an opportunity to discuss your research ideas. Meet with the stakeholders in the most accessible location for all participants. Contact works best in the context of an ongoing relationship with either the group or an individual within the group.
- Request that the meeting give members the opportunity to discuss *their perspective* of the subject under consideration.
- Sketch out your ideas for the project.
- Discuss commonalities and common goals/purpose. This may also include secondary issues related to the subject of interest, such as the impact on services or programs, implication of project, etc.
- Discuss the potential gains and benefits for each partner.
- Discuss the needed resources and commitments that will be required.
- Discuss the type of partnership(s) you would be interested in having with the other stakeholders.

Examples include:

- 1) Collaborative partnership- Stakeholders share in planning, decision-making, information, work, power, problem-solving, and responsibility.
 - 2) Decision-making partnerships- Active power-sharing where making and implementing decisions is shared between stakeholders.
 - 3) Consultative Partnerships- Stakeholders are asked to provide opinions and recommendations (eg through focus group meetings, surveys, forums).
 - 4) Operational Partnerships- Stakeholders contribute in work, information, education and promotion.
 - 5) Support Sharing Partnership -The relationship involves financial or technical assistance without operational involvement. The type of partnership(s) chosen will depend on the goals and objectives, the required activity and the level of interest of both stakeholders. It is quite possible that one project will have more than one type of partnership with more than one group of individuals.. However, endorsement and support from stakeholders will be more likely if a collaborative or decision-making partnership is chosen.
- You might also take this opportunity to describe the characteristics of partners who

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would facilitate the type of partnership you are considering. For example, if the potential partners are going to be part of the data collection and interpretation of the results, you might request individuals with expertise in these skills or an interest in learning them (if training will be provided). Stakeholders who have had experience with group dynamics and consensus building would provide an asset to project management.

- Along with partner characteristics that would assist the project, discussion should include an indication of the number of stakeholders to be involved in the project and their *representation* (e.g. individuals who can provide a specific age or gender perspective, are knowledgeable about certain cultural norms, etc)..

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Following endorsement of the idea and an indication of interest from the potential collaborators, further meetings can be arranged to discuss the project and to develop partnership agreements, prior to the start of the project. Points to consider include:

- **1) Contacting the partners** to: provide background material if applicable, determine if accommodation for accessibility will be required, and whether reimbursement will be needed for transportation and child care.
- **2) Ensure full accessibility** (information supplemented from the *Access Checklist*¹). So all participants can access the meeting, consideration should be given to:
 - a) Meeting times. Most people work during the day and are not able to take off time unless this project is being supported by their organization .
 - b) Meeting place. Should be accessible for people who use wheelchairs, have wheelchair accessible parking close to the entrance, wheelchair accessible washrooms; sufficient lighting, with public phones which are accessible and have volume control.
 - c) Communication. Includes: no jargon and the use of plain, understandable language; access to sign language interpretation if necessary; alternate media materials, ie., print materials should be photocopied 11/2 times; material made available on cassette tapes if necessary or use pictures to supplement written material.
 - d) Reimbursement for parking, child care and/or transportation should be provided.
- **3) Discuss each participants' strengths and constraints**. Examples of strengths include experience, expertise, skills, and level of commitment associated with the project. Constraints may include such issues as availability, environmental barriers, and support needed to participate. It is a good idea to record this information as it will probably influence the budget development and time frames.
- **4) Develop shared principles and values**. Regardless of the type of partnership chosen, six guiding principles² should be kept in mind:
 - A) Partnerships begin from a base of power and a spirit of collaboration.
 - B) Partnerships require a clear sense of direction and a common commitment to that direction.
 - C) Effective partnerships involve participation of relatively equal numbers of stakeholders.
 - D) Trust is the basis of strong working partnerships.

¹ DisAbled Women's Network (1993). *Access Checklist*. Toronto : DisAbled Women's Network of Ontario.

² Lord, J. (1994). *Genuine Partnerships: Challenges and Opportunities*. Keynote presentation to the National Conference on Independent Living, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Aug. 1994.

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E) Effective partnerships involve facilitation of contexts and relationships which enhance

participation of all stakeholders (key ingredients are listening, respect and good process).

F) Effective partnerships exchange valued resources.

- 5) Determine each participant's role in the project.** These decisions will be impacted by the type of partnership agreement chosen. A detailed discussion of each partners' roles and responsibilities may reveal unexpected expertise and interest.
- 6) Determine responsibilities for all participants.** Will there be parts of the project which will be the sole responsibility of certain members? Will all members be involved in all aspects of the research project or only in some parts? These decisions should be made by all participants, and will probably be influenced by factors such as the partnership agreement chosen, the experience and expertise of the participants, the willingness to learn new skills and the level of commitment toward the project.
- 7) Determine decision-making strategies.** You will want to discuss the method for decision-making and reporting structures. For example, what decisions need to be submitted to the larger community group for discussion? Will the representatives be reporting to the larger group at certain intervals? Will some decisions be made solely by certain members? Associated with decision-making strategies is the issue of conflict resolution. Will meetings have a facilitator? Will conflicts be resolved-through consensus, majority, compromise or a third party mediator?
- 8) Define benefits to participation.** Along with the altruistic benefit of assisting people or advancing knowledge of a specific issue, concrete benefits for all participants should be identified. These may include enumeration for participation, learning new skills for personal advancement, publications, presentations at conferences, increasing a network, and property/intellectual rights. All members should discuss benefits prior to starting the project.
- 9) Decide on enumeration and budget.** Associated with benefits is the development of the project budget. Along with the decision regarding enumeration, the budget should reflect the need to ensure accessibility of community participation.
- 10) Develop time line.** Consideration must be given to such factors as the need for training and providing background material, the need to report to the larger community group, and a greater number of participants influencing meeting schedules. A certain amount of flexibility should be integrated into the time line, to account for unexpected events.
- 11) Define ethical considerations.** Discussion should ensue about who has access to information and how confidentiality will be protected.

DURING THE PROJECT

Since many of the process issues were identified and discussed as part of the partnership agreement, successful collaboration during the project will, in large part, be influenced by how the partners treat each other. Encouraging an atmosphere and attitude of collaboration will influence the success of the project.

Endorse and promote collaborative values such as:

- Valuing the input from all participants
- Treating all participants with respect
- Perpetuating trust among participants by being open and truthful
- Ensuring full participation by being cognizant of physical, social and attitudinal constraints/barriers
- Continually sharing information with all participants or determine desired level and type of

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- Being open to learning from each other
- Being flexible to new ways of doing things or viewing circumstances
- Understanding that sharing decision making and responsibilities will increase commitment by participants to the project.
- Provide a mechanism for evaluation.** This should include criteria to evaluate the effectiveness and satisfaction of the partners in the research process, adherence to the partnership agreement, and research outcomes.
- Provide opportunities to reassess the partnership agreement** to ensure that it meets the needs and requirements of the partners and is still effective for the success of the project.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Partners should agree on where and how the results of the project are to be disseminated. Consideration should be given to information dissemination in alternate media formats such as Braille, cassettes, large print, computer diskettes. It goes without saying that all contributions should be formally acknowledged.

Consideration should be given to community members being primary authors of the report to community groups, newsletters, or magazines, etc. Although this write-up will probably be quite different in format than an academic journal submission, collaboration can be helpful in assessing the method, results, discussion and future research. As well, this is the opportunity to discuss how the project can impact programs, services or communities.