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BUILDING BETTER BEGINNINGS: A TOOLKIT

Engaging Community Partners



Better Beginnings, Better Futures

An effective, affordable community project for promoting positive child development

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INTRODUCTION



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Motivation

Learn what motivates service providers to participate and partner in a community-based prevention initiative.

2. Benefits

Understand and appreciate the benefits of community partnerships and coalitions.

3. Challenges

Understand and appreciate the challenges of building community partnerships and coalitions.

4. Strategies

Be aware of strategies to develop partnerships within the community.

5. Principles

Know the principles of developing partnerships and coalitions within the community.

BETTER BEGINNINGS, BETTER FUTURES PARTNERSHIPS

A brief history

Collaboration among service providers was a key component of the *Better Beginnings* program model; therefore, those awarded grants were able to demonstrate some level of partnerships among community agencies and organizations. In each of the project sites, key stakeholders had partnered with other organizations and agencies during the proposal development stage. This partnership initially took the form of like-minded individuals, who may have known of one another through past relationships or partnerships, agreeing to work together to develop a proposal to receive a *Better Beginnings* grant. For example, at Site Two, two key stakeholders met at one of the information sessions — they were the only service providers represented from their community. One was an elementary school principal and the other was a manager in a child welfare agency. These two service providers, as well as a staff member from the child welfare agency, brainstormed about what other service providers from the community should be involved. The partnerships that developed at that site developed from these initial meetings.

Many of the partnerships that developed at each of the three sites during the proposal development phase continued throughout the planning, demonstration, and sustainability phases.¹ As well, as the programs were being designed and/or implemented, new partnerships during these later stages were also forged. Key stakeholders from each of the sites always sought out service providers that could add to the prevention project in some way — that is, by filling some perceived gap in service or by providing some level of expertise that was seen to be missing.

For those wishing to learn more from the literature, please refer to the Abstracts in Appendix A.



¹The proposal development phase occurred in 1990, the planning phase from 1991-1993, the demonstration phase from 1993-1997, and sustainability occurred when the projects received sustained funding beginning in 1998.



Why partner? The benefits of partnerships

There is widespread interest in the potential advantages of greater collaboration and integration among health, social service, and educational organizations. The *Better Beginnings, Better Futures* project was designed to provide high-quality prevention programming for children and families in disadvantaged urban communities. Each project was mandated to collaborate with other organizations serving children and families in the area to help design and deliver the programs. The broad focus of the project necessitated the inclusion of service providers from many different organizations to develop the comprehensive prevention programs for children and their families.

Initially, service providers were motivated to participate because of the innovative program design, the desire to work with others to do better work, and for personal learning and professional growth. During the initial coalition and proposal development phase, some service providers were also motivated by the funding the project would receive and the potential that their own organizations or agencies could secure some of those resources.

Service providers' motivation to partner was similar during the planning, demonstration, and sustainability phases of the project.

These included:

- Shared goals and values;
- Similar mandates;
- Commitment to enhancing service delivery and to developing a collaborative program model;
- Desire to provide more services to children and families in the community;
- Acknowledgement that involvement with *Better Beginnings* projects allowed for greater access to services and to quality programming for children and families;
- Aspiration to better carry out their agency's mandate; and
- The positive reputation of *Better Beginnings*.

During the sustainability phase, key informants also reported that partnering or collaborating was more expected, and there was less resistance, than there was in the early 1990s.

The benefits or positive impacts of the partnerships and collaborations that occurred in *Better Beginnings* sites were many, including:

- Increased levels of programming;
- Increased visibility for service providers in the *Better Beginnings* communities;
- Sharing of resources (e.g., training, expertise, space), allowing for the expansion of existing programming;
- Positive changes in attitude among some service providers (e.g., learned more about community, involving residents);
- Positive changes in ways of working among some service providers (e.g., working more cooperatively with other agencies/organizations); and
- Creation of new structures (e.g., community action groups).



APPROACH



HOW TO PARTNER

In this section we get into the “nuts and bolts” of partnering and try to answer some key questions. For example, with whom should you partner? How do you organize yourselves? What roles should different partners play? How should decisions get made? Who should represent the various agencies or organizations involved? And, what supports and resources are required in developing partnerships?

In this section we’ll answer those questions before moving on to talk about the challenges of partnerships, strategies for dealing with them, and guiding principles.

Decide who to select as partners

Partners in the development and delivery of the *Better Beginnings* initiative at each site initially came together during the proposal development phase. Those individuals who began the process invited other service providers to participate whom they felt they needed in order to develop their proposals. These were individuals with expertise in the various aspects of the program model (e.g., health expertise, community development expertise). Most knew of different service providers in the community, so they knew who they wished to participate, or who they felt should participate. For example, each of the three sites knew that they would be doing some programming in the schools, and, therefore, they needed to develop those partnerships. There was also a health component to the program model; therefore, public health or community health centre representatives were approached to participate.

Community development was another important component of the program and, therefore, each of the three sites sought out service providers who worked in the *Better Beginnings* communities. These most often took the form of local grassroots community organizations, public housing services, or recreational services. In short, agencies and organizations were selected that would help the sites realize the goals of *Better Beginnings* — they had the skills, expertise, and the connections necessary to realize the vision.

The proposal development stage in *Better Beginnings* was quite short and, therefore, there may not have been the time to really consider or evaluate who should be involved in making decisions. Initially there were rarely any specific stipulations about who should be involved, with sites welcoming the involvement of any organization

with a desire to participate. The amount of time individuals at each site were able to devote to the coalition and the development of the proposal varied considerably. Although value compatibility was a motivating factor for many of the service providers with whom the *Better Beginnings* projects partnered, sometimes it was necessary to try to forge relationships with service providers who were not, initially, interested in partnering. As the projects entered into the demonstration phase, and got down to the business of providing programs, they built solid reputations in their communities that enabled partnerships to become a little easier.

TIPS

Tips to consider when selecting potential partners:

Consider the vision, values, goals and objectives of your initiative when selecting potential partners:

- Think about which service sectors would help to achieve your vision or goals — for example, from the education, health, community development and recreation sectors.
- If applicable, which departments within those sectors should be involved in your initiative? For example, from the education sector you may need to consider if you need someone from a local school involved, or whether you need someone from the school board — or both.

- Do these service providers have similar mandates to your initiative?
- Prioritize the service sectors: who is most crucial to helping you achieve your goals?
- What could partners from these different sectors contribute to your initiative?

Who are some of the partners that you could see your initiative having?

- What service providers have the necessary skills and expertise to help you realize your vision?
- Do the service providers have similar ways of working within the community?

- Do they have ties to the community?
- Do they know the community well?

Overall, is there a good “fit” between potential partners?

- Consider what groundwork may be necessary before potential partners can work together. For example, if there were any past tensions or disagreements between different potential partners, you may need to address those issues early on in order to ensure a good “fit”.

Create a shared vision for collaboration

After potential partners have been identified, this group of individuals (or coalition) needs to create a shared vision for the collaboration or partnership they are embarking upon. You will need to decide on two things in creating a shared vision for the partnership: one is the type of partnership and the other is the partnership approach. As Figure 1 shows, there are three types of partnerships and three approaches from which you can choose.



Figure 1: Types and Approaches to Service Collaboration/Integration

Types

COOPERATION	COLLABORATION	INTEGRATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A set of organizations exchanges information and discusses problems, activities or programs that are of common interest. Each organization acts autonomously in responding to the common interest either by creating its own independent initiative or by making a contribution under its own auspices to a larger initiative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations work together to solve a problem or to create a program. May involve setting common goals, the sharing of staff and other resources, and participation on joint structures to plan and monitor common activities. Each participating agency maintains control about how it will participate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The consolidation or merger over time of all or part of formally separate service units. Typically this would involve the creation of new authority structures, the pooling of staff and other resources and the establishment of common goals and working methods.

CONTINUUM FROM LESSER TO GREATER DEGREES OF INTEGRATION

Approaches

VOLUNTARY INTEGRATION	MEDIATED INTEGRATION	DIRECTED INTEGRATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A set of organizations are connected loosely and on a voluntary basis. There is no independent structure to provide coordination; each agency maintains its own autonomy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A set of organizations are linked through the efforts of one organization, which takes primary responsibility for guiding integration but may also direct services. Each organization is involved on a voluntary basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One organization has a mandate to direct the integration of a set of organizations, and has the authority to impose decisions on participating organizations.

Create a shared vision for collaboration *cont'd*

In *Better Beginnings*, the type of partnership most closely resembled “collaboration”. That is, organizations work together to solve a problem or create a program. They may set common goals, share staff and resources, and participate on joint structures to plan and monitor programs or activities, but each organization maintains control about how it will participate. The approach that was used at the *Better Beginnings* sites most closely resembled a “mediated integration”. That is, organizations or agencies are linked with one another through the efforts of one organization (i.e., *Better Beginnings*). The coordinating organization takes primary responsibility for guiding the integration but may also provide direct services. The participating organizations are involved on a voluntary basis.

Although the approach used at the *Better Beginnings* sites could be called a “mediated integration”, two program models within this approach emerged at the sites: 1) a hub and spokes model; and 2) a web model. In the hub and spokes model the primary context for service integration is in the project itself. The project, its programs and its activities are the places where integration happens. The key part of this program model was that there were few intentional connections between agencies independent of the project itself. In the web model, integration was perceived as the increased connectedness between all of the organizations, both within and outside the context of the project. All of the various organizations made up a web of programs and resources which were available to the community.



TIPS

Tips to consider when developing a shared vision:

Develop some knowledge of the types and approaches of collaboration/partnerships that are described in the literature.

- Consult the Abstracts in Appendix A for suggested readings.
- Contact researchers at universities or colleges who may have expertise in the area.

Use that knowledge to begin the thinking of what type of partnership would be best in your community.

- What “type” is most appropriate — a partnership that more resembles “cooperation” or one that requires more collaboration or integration among service providers?
- What “approach” is most appropriate — one that is strictly voluntary, a mediated approach where one organization leads the collaboration but where involvement is still voluntary, or a directed approach where one organization has the mandate for the integration of services?

Organize a “visioning” day to plan for the partnership:

- How would you like to see the community change as a result of your initiative?
- What are the short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals?
- What programming is necessary in order to achieve those goals?
- What service providers, agencies, or organizations should be involved in your initiative in order to achieve those goals?
- How might these agencies and organizations pool their resources to provide the necessary programming?
- What type and approach to partnership will be sought?
- What “identity” do you see for your coalition?

Get organized

At each of the *Better Beginnings* sites during the initial proposal development stage, some organizational structure developed to help facilitate the development of the proposal. This structure was more formal at some sites than at others, but each site had some basic way of organizing itself during the proposal development process. The structures that were developed took on the task of deciding how decisions would be made (discussed in a later section) and

began the work of developing the proposal. All of the sites devoted considerable time during the proposal development phase to the process of sharing ideas and discussing options for the site projects.

The organizational structure of each of the sites continued to evolve throughout the planning, demonstration, and sustainability phases. The structures became more formalized with more rules of governance.

The organizational structure generally took the form of one overall governing body as well as several sub-committees or working groups that addressed different issues or components of the overall program. These sub-committees or working groups would report to the governing body. During the demonstration phase, the governing bodies generally had a great deal of autonomy from their sponsoring or “umbrella” agencies.

TIPS

Tips to consider when developing an organizational structure:

Develop an initial decision-making group or steering committee — this is the group that gets things started. In developing this group you will need to think about:

- How many people should be involved in this initial decision-making group?
- Who should be represented in that group (e.g., service providers, residents, government representatives, others)?
- How often should the group meet?
- How formal should the group be? For example, you will need to decide if roles should be assigned (e.g., chairperson, secretary) and if there should be rotating positions.
- What arrangements will be made for community residents who require child care and/or transportation to attend meetings?
- Develop a terms of reference (e.g., purpose, authority, responsibilities).
- How should the group communicate between meetings and who is responsible for ensuring communication?

Once this steering committee or decision-making group is developed, and the initiative gets rolling, other structures may be developed to move the initiative along.

Smaller working groups, ad-hoc committees, or task groups could be formed to help develop different aspects of the initiative. If these structures are developed, then you will need to think about:

- Who should participate? You will need to think about who has the expertise or skills necessary to achieve your objectives of the group.
- Developing a terms of reference.
- How often, and when, the group should meet.
- How often the group should report to the main decision-making group.
- Evaluating the purpose of these groups regularly to ensure that they are still required.

How should decisions be made (see later discussion on page 11)?

Once the project or programs are planned and being implemented, the organizational structure of your initiative may need to evolve or change.

- The Steering Committee may evolve into more of a Coordinating Committee, leaving the program implementation/management to smaller committees.
- There may be smaller, permanent committees that report regularly to the Coordinating Committee.
- Ad-hoc committees or working groups may form for time-limited, specific purposes and disband as objectives are achieved.
- The organizational structure that evolves will depend upon your funders, the formality of your organization, and the goals of your initiative.

For suggested readings and on-line resources, please consult Appendix A.

Decide on the roles of partners

During the proposal development stage in *Better Beginnings*, after the initial phase of making decisions on how to begin, the focus of attention became assigning roles and responsibilities to complete the required work. For the most part, work allocation was based on self-selection; that is, whoever felt he/she had the expertise and time available for a job would volunteer. Tasks were also assigned based on individuals' or agencies' willingness to make their time available to the project. In cases where participants were given relief from other work duties, these people tended to take on more responsibility than others.

There are two general roles that service providers can play. First, service providers can participate in the administration and management of your project (i.e., serving as voting members of committees/boards of directors). Second, service providers can be active in the development and delivery of the prevention programs (e.g., providing expertise, providing staff to help deliver programs, providing space/resources). In *Better Beginnings*, these two roles, for the most part, continued throughout the planning, demonstration, and sustainability phases.

TIPS

Tips to consider in deciding the roles of partners:

Based upon your vision and goals, you will need to decide if service providers will be involved in BOTH of the roles described previously (i.e., project management and service delivery).

If partners are involved in governance, you will need to consider what structures, mechanisms, and/or agreements are required in order to make service provider involvement in administration, management or governance feasible.

- Will each partner enter into an agreement stipulating their level of involvement and what resources they can contribute to the initiative?
- Will these agreements be binding?
- Will resources need to be allocated to ensure the involvement of key service providers? For example, in one *Better Beginnings* site, teachers needed to be involved on the school committee — the project, therefore, paid for teacher release time to ensure that teachers could participate.

If partners are involved in service delivery, what structures, mechanisms and/or agreements are needed to make partnerships in service delivery productive and manageable?

- As above, you will need to consider if formal agreements need to be developed stipulating the level of involvement and what resources will be contributed to the partnership.

You may need to plan for differing levels of involvement of your partners: some larger organizations may have many resources to commit to a partnership, while other local, grassroots organizations may have fewer.



Develop a decision-making process

In all *Better Beginnings* sites decisions were arrived at through consensus. There seemed to be a commitment at each of the sites to ensuring that those involved in the governing committees had a chance to discuss issues and feel good about the decisions that were reached. Consensus seemed to work well at the three sites — few problems were reported. Perhaps consensus worked well because the individuals involved (as discussed earlier) were like-minded, knew each other, and worked in similar ways.

Decide who represents the partner agencies

As mentioned previously, the *Better Beginnings* sites did not discuss the nature of agency representation on project boards and committees in the initial stages. There was no consideration of the types of agency representatives desired (e.g., executive directors, managers, front-line personnel). As projects moved into the demonstration phase, there was more consideration given to this issue. In the early years of the projects service providers were more likely to be from upper or middle management. In the later years of the demonstration phase, representation from management continued but there was a growing shift towards including more front-line staff.

TIPS

Tips to consider in developing a decision-making process:

Decide on the process that will be used in making decisions: consensus? majority vote?

If consensus is used, you will need to be clear about what that means and training may be necessary in order to achieve it:

- Define what consensus means, how it will be achieved, and what steps or measures will be taken when consensus cannot be achieved.
- Allocate time to train committee members on how to make decisions by consensus.
- Seek out materials and/or facilitators familiar with consensus decision-making methods to use in training. [See Abstracts in Appendix A.](#)

If voting is used, then other issues will need to be considered, for example:

- What constitutes a majority?
- Should a quorum (i.e., a minimum number of members present in order for a decision to be reached) be used?
- What should constitute a quorum?

The importance of good listening skills should be stressed among all decision-makers and incorporated into training practices.

Good communication (e.g., by phone, email) among decision-makers should be maintained between meetings, as necessary.

TIPS

Tips to consider regarding who should represent the partner agencies:

Consider the roles that partners will play. Who from these organizations and agencies should be involved?

If partners are to be involved in project governance or decision-making with respect to program planning and delivery, you will need individuals with enough authority to make decisions on behalf of their organizations.

You will also need to consider the amount of time involved — you will need individuals with enough time to devote to building the partnership and getting the initiative up and running. However, there may be differing levels of involvement from different partners.

You may also need to consider the specific individuals from partnering organizations and whether there is a good “fit” between these individuals and others involved.

Strive to obtain agency support for their representatives

During the proposal development stage, there were some individuals who became involved with the *Better Beginnings* sites because of their personal commitment to the process, but who may not necessarily have had much support from their employers. During the planning, demonstration, and sustainability phases, there were differing levels of collaboration among the partners involved with the *Better Beginnings* sites. This is not surprising, as different organizations had different levels of funding and resources. In fact, during the demonstration phase, funding cutbacks faced by some organizations forced some organizations to back out of the project. Sometimes, although organizations may be committed to a collaborative initiative, they may need some help, or specific mechanisms, in order to lend their support.



TIPS

Tips to consider regarding agency support of representatives:

Recognize that not all partners will be able to commit the same level of time and resources to the collaborative initiative. Different levels of collaboration will probably be necessary, and may also be desirable.

Be clear about the **minimum** level of support and commitment that will be required to participate.

Explore with potential partners how much they are able, and willing, to contribute (e.g., staff resources, space, expertise, time).

Specific mechanisms may need to be put in place in order for some representatives to lend their support (e.g., providing teacher release time).

Secure resources to develop partnerships

For the *Better Beginnings* initiatives to initially get off the ground, potential project sites were provided with seed money (\$5,000) to develop their proposals. Devoting resources, such as this, to developing a collaboration initiative is important. The seed money that the projects received to develop their proposals

was used for expenses such as hiring staff to support the process, administrative/secretarial expenses, and promotional costs. Seed money was spent, as well, to involve residents in the process by covering any participation costs (e.g., transportation, child care), and by providing food at meetings.

In-kind resources provided by partnering agencies and organizations are also important to the development of collaborative initiatives. In the *Better Beginnings* sites, different organizations provided various in-kind resources. Most notably, these in-kind resources included staff time, space, and equipment or materials (see table below).

STAFF TIME

During the proposal development phase this included time provided by different staff persons to attend meetings, and to help in the development of the proposal, as well as administrative assistance when necessary. During the planning, demonstration and sustainability phases this included staff time needed to train program staff, deliver programs from different agencies on-site in the community, and co-deliver programs on-site with *Better Beginnings* staff.

SPACE

Usually the sponsoring or “umbrella” agency at each of the three sites provided space for meetings during all stages of the projects. As well, schools in each of the sites provided space to *Better Beginnings* staff in order to deliver programs. Further, the *Better Beginnings* sites also provided space to others in order to provide on-site resources to community residents.

EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS

Different organizations also provided *Better Beginnings* with various types of equipment and materials when necessary.

CHALLENGES

CHALLENGES OF PARTNERING AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THEM

The benefits and positive outcomes in the *Better Beginnings* sites of the partnerships they enjoyed with other agencies or organizations were many, as described earlier. Nonetheless each of the sites experienced its own barriers, obstacles, and challenges in collaborating with others. These challenges are described in this section. The strategies that could be used to deal with each of these challenges are also discussed.



Figuring out how to work together

As was mentioned earlier, the *Better Beginnings* sites were mandated to collaborate or “integrate” with other service providers in the community, with little specific information or guidance from the government about how this was to be achieved. It is not surprising, then, that the *Better Beginnings* sites reported that there was confusion and a lack of understanding about service providers’ roles. Service providers themselves also reported that they would have been more comfortable if they had known from the outset what was expected of them.

These struggles were most evident in the proposal development and planning phases, as well as in the early part of the demonstration phase. As time went on, the sites stopped looking to the government for guidance and clearer expectations — they just seemed to get on with it! In the latter half of the demonstration phase, the language of “partners” or “partnerships” developed and the sites became more comfortable with the roles of service providers.

STRATEGIES

- Try to be clear from the outset about what is meant by “collaboration” or “coordination” and what various service providers’ roles can or should be in the collaborative initiative.
- Use clear language and ensure everyone knows what is meant by the terms used.



Differing levels of support and commitment from collaborating agencies

In the *Better Beginnings* projects, site representatives struggled with the reality that the agencies they approached to participate in *Better Beginnings* had no mandate for integration, and in some cases, lacked a real commitment to the project. The burden of trying to integrate services in the communities fell mostly on the shoulders of *Better Beginnings* representatives.

In some cases this lack of support for the *Better Beginnings* integration initiative meant that agencies approached to participate did not see *Better Beginnings* as relevant enough to their aims or worth the effort of trying to collaborate with the sites. In other cases this meant that although the agency as a whole provided little or no support to the *Better Beginnings* project, individual service providers within that agency participated because of their own personal commitment to the project. Thus, in many cases, participation in *Better Beginnings*, *Better Futures* was an “add-on” to the service providers’ everyday responsibilities. Further, if those individuals left their positions the next person coming in did not necessarily share the same commitment as his/her predecessor. Thus, turnover of representatives at the agencies became problematic in some cases.

It was also common for the *Better Beginnings* projects to encounter roadblocks in adapting to bureaucratic procedures in place in the participating organizations. For example, for agencies sponsoring *Better Beginnings* programs, project representatives had to deal with unions, existing job descriptions and pay scales, and territoriality among existing agency/organization staff.

STRATEGIES

- Consider who should be involved and invite those partners to the table.
 - Partners should be selected based upon the work that they do in the community, as well as their goals and values.
 - It important to consider the type of agency representation — e.g., executive directors, managers, front-line personnel.
 - There has to be a “good fit” between partners.
- Ensure that you get involved in community networks or coalitions that align with the programs or services you are providing.
 - These networks and coalitions may help “spread the word”, as well as keep you connected and more aware of programs, services, issues, or challenges facing the community.
 - The networks or coalitions may be good places to identify potential partners and to begin the process of relationship building.
- Include service providers/partners in strategic planning.
 - Planning days/retreats or strategic planning meetings should include the service providers you wish to partner with.
 - *Better Beginnings* staff sought out partners they thought should be involved and made it understood that they wanted the expertise and consultation of these service providers.
- Try to be as clear as possible about expectations, roles, and commitment (i.e., resources, time) required. Be equally clear as well about the potential benefits of the collaboration.
- Try to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to train new representatives from different agencies and organizations, as former representatives leave their positions.
 - It is important, therefore, to have organizational-level support, rather than depend solely on individual-level support.



Learning to trust and creating a balance

Some key informants at the *Better Beginnings* sites also alluded to problems in developing trust with certain organizations. It takes time to build trusting relationships, and time to maintain those collaborations as well. When there was turnover among individual service providers that *Better Beginnings* worked with, it took time to build new partnerships and relationships with those individuals. Further, there were challenges faced in finding an appropriate power balance between service provider involvement, community resident participation, and staff involvement.

STRATEGIES

- Create opportunities to build interpersonal relationships:
 - Informal time in meetings or gatherings to share food and conversation is important.
 - Invite service providers to local celebrations or festivals in the community.
 - Interpersonal relationships are key to overcoming any challenges and obstacles that may be faced.
- Recognize and nurture the partnerships/relationships:
 - Recognize the efforts of your partners by planning special appreciation events or sending out thank you cards.
 - Ensure that some time is spent to nurture the relationships; check in informally with partners, spend time talking to them, and hold special events.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Guiding Principles for Developing Community Partnerships

1. **It is important that partners have a common vision as well as common goals and values.**
 - In the *Better Beginnings* context it was those organizations and agencies that most closely aligned with *Better Beginnings* that became the strongest partners.
2. **The organizations and people involved in the collaboration should be committed to the process and be flexible.**
 - It is important that the organization, and not just an individual, be committed to the process.
 - Partnerships or collaborations are an evolutionary process; the individuals involved need to be flexible to adapt to changes that occur.
 - It is essential that front-line staff endorse the collaboration or partnership; as well, it is equally important to have individuals with decision-making authority involved.
3. **Good leadership of the collaborative effort is important.**
 - In *Better Beginnings*, at least in the early and middle years, it was the project sites themselves that were the context for the collaboration and partnership efforts that occurred. Having one organization or person responsible for overseeing the collaboration can facilitate the process.
 - Leaders in collaborative efforts need to guide and direct the process, as well as be responsive to it.
 - Staff of the mediating organization, therefore, need to play a critical role.
4. **Partners will need to invest considerable time into the start-up of a collaboration.**
 - In the *Better Beginnings* sites it sometimes took several years before a strong partnership or collaboration evolved.
 - Time and effort are required to build trusting interpersonal relationships.
 - Good interpersonal relations based upon mutual trust and respect are important.
 - Respectful partnerships between formal service providers, created by getting to know one another personally and having safe environments in which to interact, were seen as critical to their success in fostering cooperation between service organizations.
 - Open communication was frequently mentioned as important in an effective collaboration.
5. **Establish strong and clear arrangements for the collaboration or partnership.**
 - Arrangements should be as clear, straightforward, and unambiguous as possible.
 - In the *Better Beginnings* sites, service organizations and agencies partnered with *Better Beginnings* on specific programs and activities where the parameters of the collaboration were quite clear.
6. **Residents play an important role:**
 - Key informants believed that residents played a critical role in identifying the priorities of the community and guiding program development issues.
 - Identifying the priorities then helps in determining which agencies should be involved in neighbourhood-based collaborations. As well, residents will then be more open to working with service providers from the agencies identified.
7. **Specific formal mechanisms can help:**
 - In one *Better Beginnings* site, the project paid for release time so that teachers could actively participate on decision-making committees that were held during work hours.
 - In other sites, small, task-focused groups in which residents and service providers participated were also seen as useful structures to facilitate service providers' involvement in program development.
8. **Ensure ongoing monitoring, review and organizational learning.**
 - Through their involvement with other coalitions, committees, and networks in their communities, *Better Beginnings* personnel continually monitored or evaluated the nature of partnerships and collaborations that were occurring or needed to occur.
 - The interpersonal relationships that developed, and the role that service providers played on working groups and committees, also helped to ensure that partnerships/collaborations were evaluated and that the organizations and agencies involved continually learned from these relationships.

Implementation/Evaluation Checklist

- Have you thought about what types of partners may be best to work with based upon the skills and expertise they could bring to your initiative, as well as how well their goals and ways of working align with your own?
- Have you thought specifically about who your potential partners might be? What level of support or commitment might these different partners bring to the table?
- Who from the different potential partnering agencies or organizations should represent the organizations (i.e., executive directors, managers, front-line personnel)?
- Have you considered the different types or approaches to collaboration and what program model you think might be best for your initiative?
- Have you thought about what type of organizational structure might work best?
- Have you considered the different roles that partners may play in your initiative?
- What type of decision-making process will work best?
- How will you go about monitoring or reviewing the nature of the partnerships developed?

APPENDICES



APPENDIX A:

On-line Resources and Abstracts

On-line resources:

1. <http://ctb.ku.edu>

The *Community Tool Box* is an on-line global resource for free information on essential skills for building healthy communities. It offers more than 7,000 pages of practical guidance in creating change and improvement. There are specific chapters devoted to developing partnerships, coalitions, and organizational structures.

Abstracts

Foster-Fishman, P.G., Berkowitz, S.L., Lounsbury, D.W., Jacobson, S., & Allen, N.A. (2001). **Building collaborative capacity in community coalitions: A review and integrative framework.** *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 29, 241-261.

This article presents the results of a qualitative analysis of 80 articles, chapters, and practitioners' guides focused on collaboration and coalition functioning. The purpose of this review was to develop an integrative framework that captures the core competencies and processes needed within collaborative bodies to facilitate their success. The resulting framework for building collaborative capacity is presented. Four critical levels of collaborative capacity—member capacity, relational capacity, organizational capacity, and programmatic capacity—are described and strategies for building each type are provided. The implications of this model for practitioners and scholars are discussed.

Nelson, G., Pancer, S.M., Hayward, K., & Peters, R.DeV. (2005). **Partnerships for prevention: The story of the Highfield Community Enrichment Project.** *Toronto: University of Toronto Press.* (Chapter 9)

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on service provider partnerships and service integration. As well, factors that facilitate service provider involvement, the types of partners, the nature of service provider involvement, and obstacles and barriers to service provider involvement are described in the context of one of the Better Beginnings sites.

Warburton, J., Everingham, J., Cuthill, M., & Bartlett, H. (2008). **Achieving effective collaborations to help communities age well.** *The Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 67, 470-482.

Effective policy responses to the ageing of the population are a priority area for government and non-government agencies across Australia, particularly at the community level. This article focuses on the policy goal of ageing well at the local level, and more specifically, the strong principle of collaboration that underpins this goal. Too little is known about how to achieve effective collaboration in the ageing field. This article aims to address this by developing an analytical framework from the broad literature on collaborative processes, and applying this framework to data collected from interviews with stakeholders in ageing across two local communities in Queensland. While participants recognise the importance and strength of working together and provide local examples of how this has been achieved effectively, they also acknowledge the associated challenges and complexity. This all spanned the six factors of the framework: the context of ageing; the characteristics and relationships between partners; the need for adequate procedures; as well as structure and relationships aimed at building capacity; a shared sense of purpose; and access to adequate resources.



Better Beginnings, Better Futures

An effective, affordable community project for promoting positive child development