

# Strategic Partnership Development

*Achieving Collaborative Advantage in Public Health*

A Toolkit



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A Toolkit

# Strategic Partnership Development

*Achieving Collaborative Advantage in Public Health*

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## Support for Foundational Public Health Services & Public Health Accreditation Board Standards and Measures

*This toolkit supports health departments in their pursuit of Foundational Public Health Services, specifically Community Partnership Development. Additionally, this work supports Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) Accreditation Standards and Measures Domain 4: Community Engagement and Partnerships, including:*

- *Standard 4.1: Establish and maintain relationships with cross-sector and community partners to improve health.*
  - *Measure 4.1.1: Engage community members and organizations in public health initiatives.*
  - *Measure 4.1.2: Establish formal partnerships through agreements or shared projects.*
  - *Measure 4.1.3: Assess the effectiveness of partnerships and adjust strategies as needed.*
- *Standard 7.1: Coordinate public health system partners to promote population health.*
  - *Measure 7.1.1: Foster a collaborative network of public health system partners.*
  - *Measure 7.1.2: Develop joint initiatives with partners for health improvement.*
- *Standard 11.1: Maintain an effective public health infrastructure.*
  - *Measure 11.1.3: Ensure partnerships contribute to operational effectiveness and resource sharing.*

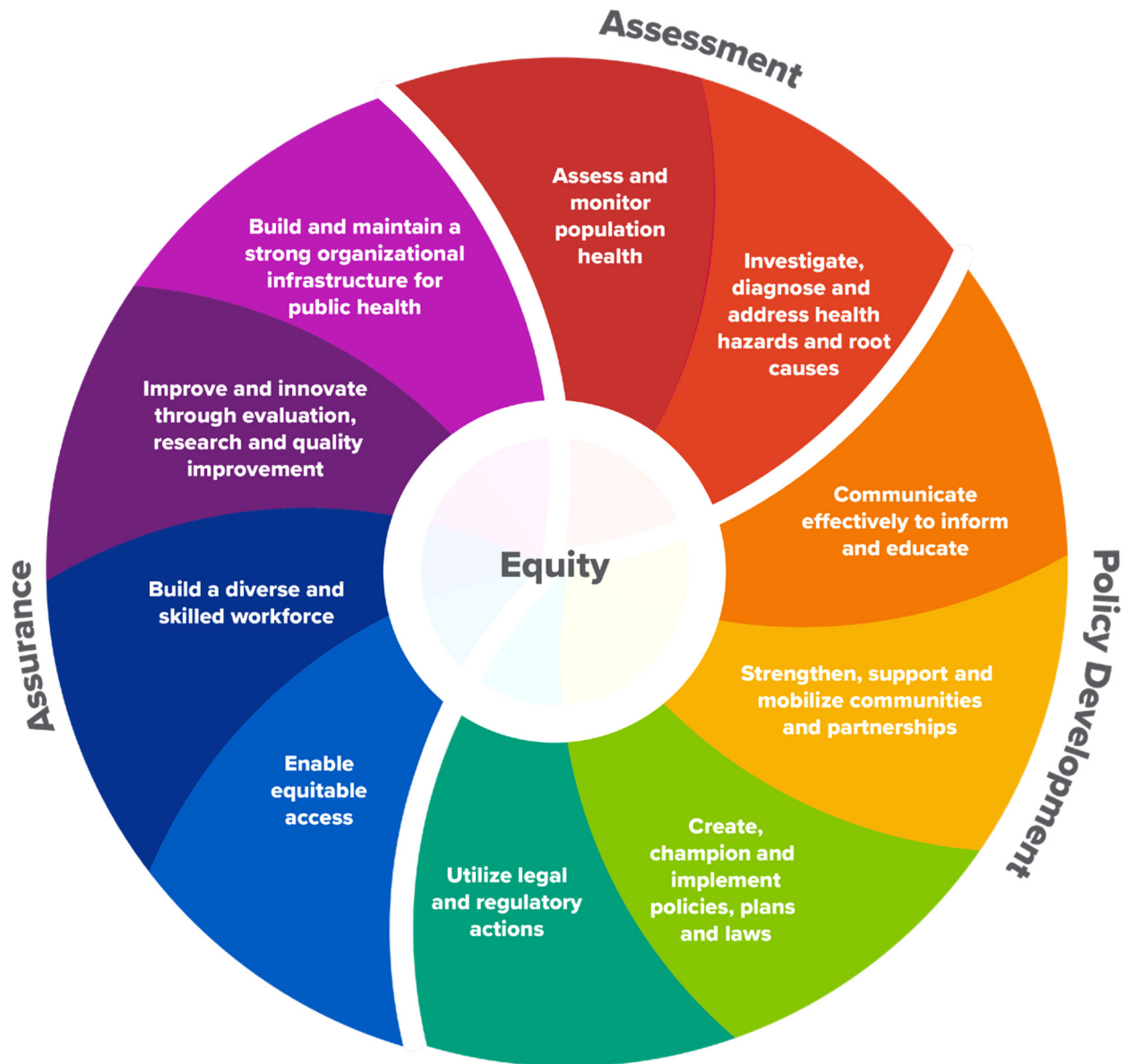




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Figure 1: Partnership Development as an Essential Public Health Service



Source: Public Health Accreditation Board. (2020). The 10 Essential Public Health Services.  
<https://phaboard.org/wp-content/uploads/EPHS-English.pdf>

# Introduction

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The public health system is made up of a wide network of governmental and non-governmental professionals and organizations, all working toward a common goal of improving population health.<sup>1</sup> These professionals and organizations share a mission to “fulfill society’s interest in ensuring conditions where people can be healthy.”<sup>2</sup> Achieving this ambitious goal requires coordination and collaboration across multiple sectors, agencies and individuals. Governmental public health agencies, in particular, have a unique responsibility to **strengthen and mobilize communities and partnerships**, as outlined in Essential Public Health Service #4 (*Figure 1*, page 6).<sup>3</sup>

Public health leaders face some of society’s toughest challenges. From preparing for pandemics and responding to public health emergencies to addressing environmental sustainability, responding to the chronic disease epidemic and tackling entrenched health inequities — these issues stretch across various organizations and disciplines.<sup>4</sup> That’s where strategic partnerships come in. The power of partnerships lies in their collaborative advantage — by working together, partners can create something greater than any organization could achieve on its own.<sup>5</sup>

However, while the potential of partnerships is significant, not all partnerships deliver the expected outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Many partnerships encounter inertia, where progress slows, and even small achievements seem difficult to reach.<sup>5</sup>

## What Is the Purpose of This Toolkit?

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide public health leaders with practical tools to overcome barriers to strategic partnerships and maximize their collaborative advantage — the transformative power of partnerships where collective results far exceed what any one organization could achieve alone. This toolkit will help public health leaders determine what partnerships are strategic, how to structure their partnerships, and how to make them work.

## What’s Inside This Toolkit?

This toolkit contains information and reflective worksheets to help public health leaders think more strategically about the partnerships they pursue.



### *Steps to Developing Strategic Partnerships*

Evidence-based information from thought leaders in public health and business partnership development:

- Considerations before beginning a partnership
- Determining if a partnership is strategic
- Determining the right form of collaboration
- Making partnerships work



### *Interactive Tools*

Tools to help you reflect on the strategic value of your partnerships and how to make them function better.



### *Partnership Stories*

Real life stories from the authors’ perspective on how they have used lessons from this toolkit to improve the partnerships they are involved in.

## Who Is This Toolkit For?

This toolkit is designed for public health leaders at all levels. Whether you’re a state health department director working to build a more connected public health system or a local program manager establishing community partnerships, the insights here apply across a range of roles.

# Strategic Thinking in Public Health

We've all likely heard the phrase, "We need to be more strategic." But what does being strategic really mean? Strategy can be defined in many ways — whether it's aligning an organization's capabilities with its environment, creating a unique position that others can't copy, or setting a compelling vision for the future.<sup>7</sup> At its core, though, strategy is about building a successful organization that can navigate challenges, adapt to threats and capitalize on opportunities.<sup>8</sup>

In their book *Playing to Win — How Strategy Really Works*, A.G. Lafley and Roger Martin define strategy as "a set of **choices** leaders make about **how to win** that **uniquely positions** their organization to create **sustainable advantage** and **superior value** relative to the competition." For public health leaders, this definition highlights a few important focus areas.

- **Choice:** Strategic public health leaders recognize their power to shape their organization's direction. Health departments do not have to be constrained by their circumstances — they can challenge the status quo and redefine their approach.
- **Winning Aspiration:** Strategic public health leaders are clear about their organization's winning aspirations — their value proposition to their stakeholders.
- **Unique Position:** Strategic public health leaders focus on what they can do better than any other organization and avoid duplicating the strengths of other partners.
- **Sustainable Advantage:** Strategic public health leaders create the leverage needed to solve ingrained public health challenges.
- **Superior Value:** Strategic public health leaders have a clear vision for how their organization produces value and creates buy-in and support from stakeholders.

***"Strategy is a set of choices leaders make about how to win that uniquely positions their organization to create sustainable advantage and superior value."***



Source: Lafley, A. G., & Martin, R. L. (2013). *Playing to Win — How Strategy Really Works*. Harvard Business Review Press.

Partnerships have great potential to advance your organization's strategic goals. But strategic partnerships require a clear focus on how they align with your strategic aims. This includes how partnerships will support your organization's winning aspiration. Working in partnerships is rewarding but also can be challenging. A strategic approach ensures that partnerships contribute to your agency's broader goals, rather than becoming just another task to manage.



# Steps to Developing Strategic Partnerships



## Considerations Before Beginning a Partnership

Public health leaders engage in partnerships at various stages — from initial discussions to long-standing collaborations. This toolkit frames the strategic partnership process as a continuum, guiding you through key steps to establish, evaluate and strengthen partnerships.

### Where To Start?

This toolkit is designed for flexible use. Depending on your needs, you may start in different sections:

- **Considerations Before Beginning a Partnership** — Focuses on your organization's role as a partner. Start here if you are launching a new partnership or revitalizing an existing one.
- **Determining if a Partnership Is Strategic** — Helps assess whether a partnership aligns with your organization's goals and value proposition. Start here if you're evaluating potential partnerships or reconsidering existing ones.
- **Determining the Right Form of Collaboration** — Outlines how partnerships are structured, including authority, reporting and responsibilities. Start here if you're designing a complex collaboration with many partners.
- **Making Partnerships Work** — Provides strategies to build engagement, momentum and impact. Start here if a partnership feels stagnant or isn't meeting expectations.



## Determining if a Partnership Is Strategic



## Determining the Right Form of Collaboration



## Making Partnerships Work

### A Non-Linear Process

Partnerships do not follow a strict, linear path. Some collaborations achieve success rapidly, while others struggle to gain traction. Use this toolkit as needed to navigate challenges and enhance collaboration. Strong partnerships are essential for effective public health — the goal of this toolkit is to help partnerships become stronger.



# Considerations Before Beginning a Partnership

## Understand Your Organization's Readiness to Partner

Before diving into strategic partnerships, it's essential to lay the groundwork to ensure your organization is set up for success. Start by understanding your organization's strengths, challenges and what you want to achieve through a partnership. Reflect on your organization's past partnerships by asking some key questions:

1. What partnerships have we had before?
2. Which ones worked well, and why?
3. What didn't go as planned?
4. Are we seen as good partners? Why or why not?
5. How much influence do we want partnerships to have on our own operations?
6. What are we willing—or not willing—to change for them?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Foundation also emphasizes the value of identifying “bridge builders” within your organization, those who have the skills and capacity to connect with others.<sup>9</sup> These individuals can play a strategic role in helping partnerships thrive. It's also helpful to consider other readiness factors, such as how much your organization supports staff involvement in collaborations or how open you are to shared decision-making.

Finally, being clear about your goals for partnerships is crucial. Bringing your team together to define a shared vision and set specific goals can help lay a strong foundation for successful partnerships.

### **Clarify What Your Organization Needs to Gain and Has to Contribute**

For any strategic partnership to succeed, it's essential to know both what your organization hopes

to gain and what it's willing to contribute. This clarity keeps your organization engaged in the partnership and helps attract committed partners.

Start by assessing your organization's strengths and capacities. These might include staff skills — like data analysis, policy development or advocacy — as well as resources such as funding, key relationships or services that add value to the partnership. At the same time, consider what gaps a partnership might help fill.

### **Assessing and Strengthening Trust**

You've probably heard the saying that partnerships “move at the speed of trust,” and it's true — trust is essential for any successful strategic partnership. Before forming new partnerships, it's important to assess the current level of trust between prospective partners and reflect on the history of trust within these relationships. Trust in public health partnerships usually includes several key elements: vulnerability (openness to a partner's actions), integrity, reliability, competence, shared values, power-sharing and reciprocity.<sup>10</sup> Trust can either provide a strong foundation or, if lacking, undermine the effort to build and sustain a partnership.

A good place to start is by assessing trust internally. Ask yourself questions like:

- Which organizations do we trust, and why?
- What makes them trustworthy?
- Are we seen as a trusted partner, and how do we know?
- What might prevent others from trusting us?

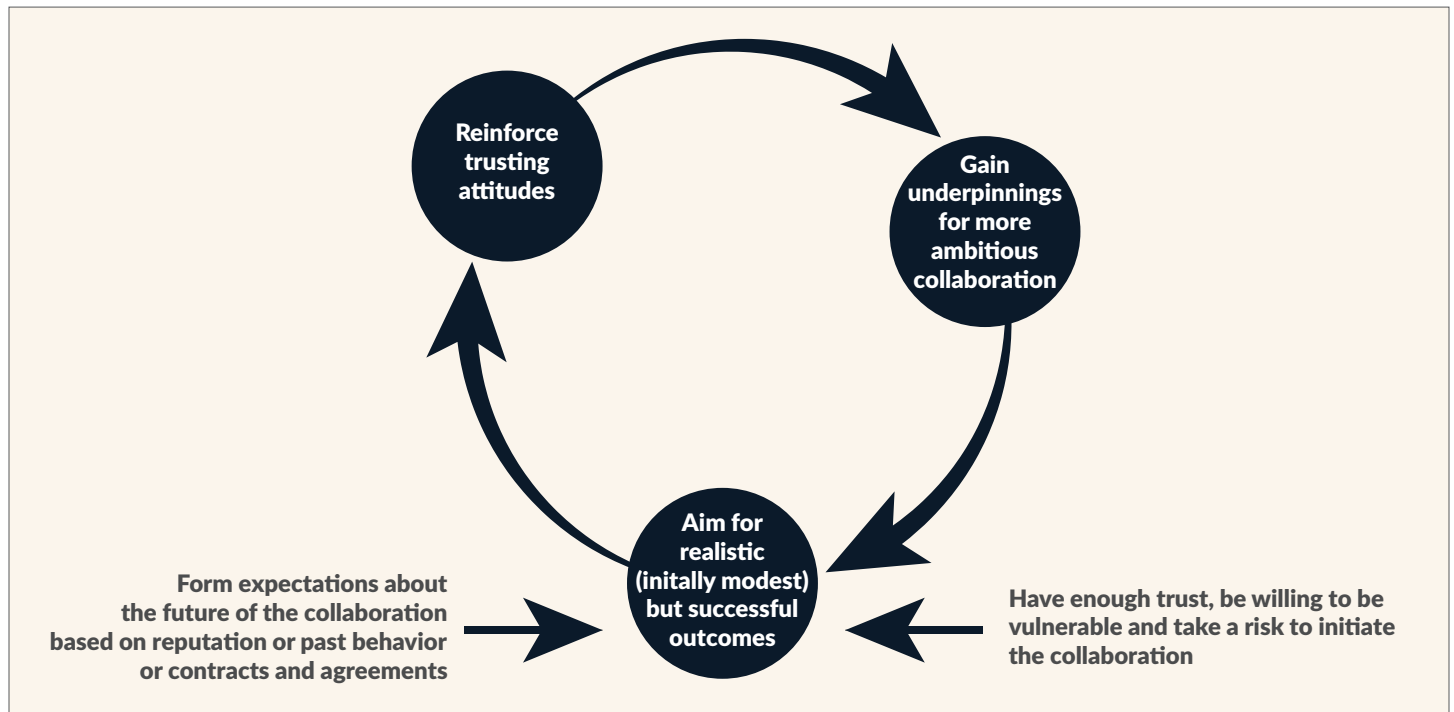
Assessing trust between organizations can be equally eye-opening. The *Collaboration Trust Tool* from the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) is a helpful resource for evaluating trust across five areas: partner behavior, communication, knowledge and skills, integrity, and investment in community well-being.<sup>11</sup>

This tool provides an overall trust score and breaks it down by domain, highlighting areas that may need improvement. For instance, if communication scores are low, it may point to an opportunity to improve communication practices and strengthen trust.

Trust isn't built overnight — it grows and deepens over time. Research shows that trust often follows a cycle, beginning with small, low-risk goals that

lay the groundwork for trust to take root. As trust builds, partnerships can pursue larger goals and higher risks. Vangen and Huxham refer to this as the Cyclical Trust Building Loop (*Figure 2*).<sup>12</sup> This recognizes that even strong partnerships can go through periods of lower trust. Miscommunication or disagreements can erode trust. But returning to smaller, low-risk efforts can help repair it and keep the partnership moving forward.

**Figure 2: The Cyclical Trust Building Loop**



Source: Vangen S. & Huxham C. Nurturing Collaborative Relations: Building Trust in Interorganizational Collaboration. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 2003;39(5):5–31.



### **Key Takeaways**

Reflect on your previous experiences with partnerships to:

- Clarify what has worked well and what hasn't.
- Identify what types of partners you have worked well with and why.
- Identify aspects of your organization crucial to supporting partnerships.
- Reflect on what your organization and your potential partners might need from the partnership and how you can support each other's needs.
- Reflect on what you can do to build trust in your partnerships as a way to work toward more ambitious goals.



### **Interactive Tool**

The interactive tool on the next page will help you reflect on and plan for those things to consider about your team and your organization before beginning a partnership.



# Interactive Tool

## *Reflection: Considerations Before Beginning a Partnership*

### **Purpose of the Tool**

This tool is designed to help you reflect on the factors within your organization, division or other unit that influence your ability to be a strong partner.

### **Instructions**

- Review the questions in this worksheet individually or with your team.
- Consider each question carefully. Think about how you would answer, as well as how other team members — especially those not present — might respond.
- Record your answers:
  - If working alone, write them on a sheet of paper.
  - If working with a team, capture responses on a whiteboard or projected slide.
- After completing the reflection, discuss or consider how your organization can become a better partner.

### **Past Partnerships**

- What partnerships have we had before?
- Which ones worked well, and why?
- What didn't go as planned?
- Are we seen as good partners? Why or why not?
- How much influence do we want partnerships to have?
- What are we willing — or not willing — to change for them?

### **Gains and Contributions**

- What does your organization hope to gain as a result of this partnership? Consider the list of “Benefits of Collaboration” on page 14.
- What are your organization's strengths and capacities? What can your organization contribute to the partnership?

### **Assessing Trust**

- Which organizations do we trust and why?
- What makes them trustworthy?
- Are we seen as a trusted partner, and how do we know?
- What might prevent others from trusting us?

### **Becoming a Better Partner**

- Think about your answers. How might you and your organization become a better partner?





# Determining if a Partnership Is Strategic

Collaboration happens when organizations exchange information, adjust their activities, share resources and enhance each other's capacity for mutual benefit, all while sharing risks, responsibilities and rewards.<sup>5</sup> Developing partnerships is crucial for public health leadership, but strategic leaders know that not all partnerships are created equal.<sup>13</sup> It's important to assess which collaborations will truly bring value.

While partnerships can offer tremendous potential, working together can sometimes be more challenging than working individually.<sup>6</sup> To figure out if a partnership is strategic, leaders need to weigh the benefits against the costs.<sup>14</sup> This involves asking key questions:

- **Does the partnership help us achieve our goals?**
- **Are the resources and efforts we're putting in worth the outcomes we expect to see?**

This section will help you work through how to evaluate potential benefits and costs of a partnership to help determine whether it's a strategic fit for your organization. By thinking critically about these factors, you can focus on partnerships that will drive your organization's success and avoid those that may drain resources without delivering the intended results.

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## PARTNERSHIP STORY

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### Enhancing Public Health Students' Workforce Readiness Through Mentorship: Knowing Our Strategy Improves How We Partner

Ellyn R. Mulcahy, Ph.D., M.P.H.\*\* | Kansas State University

Mentorship is a high-impact investment in the growth and development of public health students. While academic mentorship is embedded in public health programs, access to mentorship from field professionals is often limited. Alumni networks can serve as a valuable bridge, providing career guidance and networking opportunities — especially for students without existing industry connections.

Kansas State University's Master of Public Health program (K-State MPH program) has long connected students with public health mentors, initially through informal efforts. Recognizing the need for stronger, more structured partnerships, the K-State MPH program has since formalized this process to enhance mentorship quality and strategic collaboration with public health professionals.

#### Defining Our Winning Aspiration

To foster more strategic partnerships, the K-State MPH program needed a clear vision. Our winning aspiration became: *"To prepare students for the workforce by not only strengthening their public health skills but also equipping them for professional success after graduation."* Achieving this goal required deep, sustained relationships with skilled public health professionals actively working in the field.

#### Building Meaningful, Reciprocal Partnerships

A successful mentorship program requires clarity on both **what the K-State MPH program needs from partners and what the MPH program can contribute.** To strengthen these

*continued*

*continued*

relationships, we developed a **mentorship guide**, ensuring that mentor-mentee matches are based on shared interests and mutual benefits.

### What the K-State MPH Program Needs From Mentors:

- Career guidance and real-world insights into public health practice.
- Enthusiasm for mentoring and engaging with students.

### What the K-State MPH Program Offers in Return:

- Students eager to contribute to projects with limited capacity.
- Fresh perspectives, enthusiasm and curiosity.
- Faculty support for specialized expertise when needed.

By clearly defining expectations and benefits for both **mentors and mentees**, the K-State MPH Program has built stronger, more sustainable partnerships.

### Overcoming Challenges, Expanding for the Future

Early in the process, **lack of structure** was a challenge – there was no clear mentor pool and expectations were ambiguous. Using our **mentorship guide**, the K-State MPH program outlined **roles, activities and expectations**, which allowed for the creation of a sustainable mentor network and the ability to foster **win-win partnerships** among students, mentors and our MPH program.

Looking ahead, the K-State MPH program aims to **expand mentorship opportunities with more public health agencies** and **broaden its network of professionals** willing to share their expertise, ensuring a stronger, more prepared public health workforce for Kansas and beyond.

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## The Benefits of Collaboration

Partnerships hold great promise, and public health leaders are often drawn to collaborating with external partners. This is crucial because boundary-spanning leaders are essential to addressing complex public health challenges. But when evaluating the strategic value of a partnership, it's important to clearly define the potential benefits.

Research has highlighted several reasons why organizations should consider working with external partners:<sup>15,16</sup>

- **Productivity:** Collaboration can help an organization accomplish more than it could on its own, advancing its mission or goals. For example, a health department partnering with a local school system could launch a comprehensive youth health initiative that neither could manage alone.
- **Capacity:** Partnerships can help organizations acquire and organize the resources they need. For instance, a health department teaming up with a private foundation might gain the funding and expertise required to expand services.
- **Adaptability:** Working with partners can make organizations more flexible, helping them navigate uncertainty or new challenges. A community health coalition, for example, can offer a broader perspective on an issue, helping partners reduce blind spots and find new ways to solve problems.
- **Legitimacy:** Collaboration also can boost an organization's reputation. A public health agency might enhance its standing by partnering with a respected academic institution on a high-profile health campaign.
- **Efficiency:** While partnerships sometimes reduce efficiency, they can save time and money when efforts are delegated or deduplicated. For example, a health department might outsource its immunization program to a Federally Qualified Health Center, freeing up resources for other priorities.
- **Linkages:** Partnerships often open doors to broader networks and create new connections. A public health agency working with a community-based organization, for example, could strengthen its ties with populations facing health inequities.

These benefits reflect how collaboration can serve an organization’s self-interests. And while achieving these outcomes is a common reason for partnering, there’s potential for even greater results.<sup>5</sup>

Collaborative advantage (Figure 3) refers to the transformative power of partnerships where the collective results are far greater than what any one organization could achieve on its own. When organizations align around a common purpose, build trust and share resources, they create the conditions for creativity, innovation and transformative change. This is the essence of collaborative advantage — where value is truly maximized.<sup>4</sup>

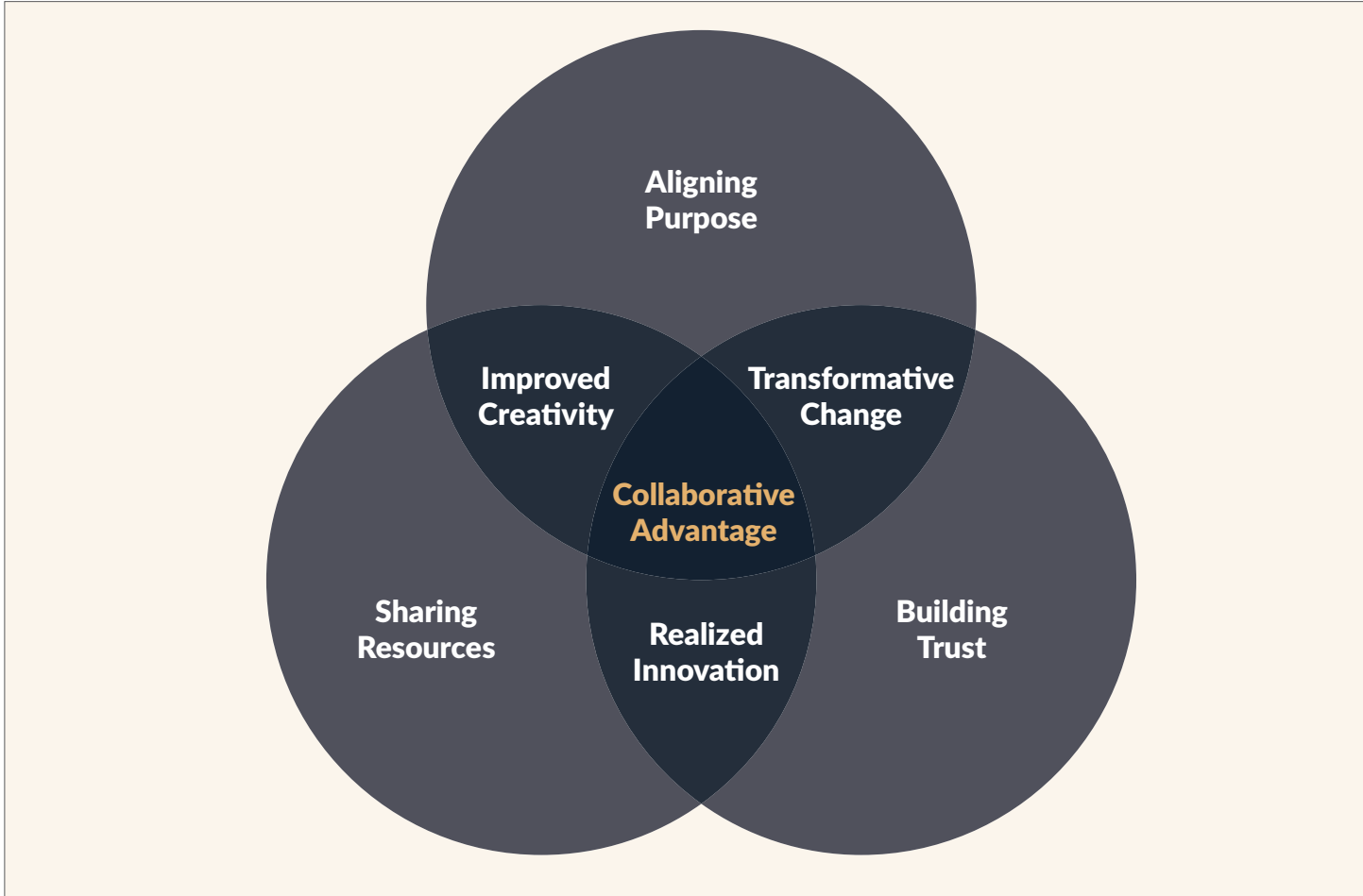
### Costs of Collaboration

While partnerships offer potential benefits, they also come with unique costs not typically encountered

when an organization operates independently. These costs often arise from the complexities of merging different organizational structures, cultures and decision-making processes, as well as the lack of formal authority among partners. One of the most common challenges is collaborative inertia, where the effort required to coordinate and align across organizations slows progress, making partnerships move more slowly than anticipated.<sup>6</sup> It’s important to weigh these potential costs when evaluating whether collaboration is strategically valuable. Some key costs associated with partnerships include:<sup>17</sup>

- **Goal Conflict:** Collaboration can become ineffective when goals are unclear, misaligned or unspecific. Differing opinions on the partnership’s objectives can introduce tension and slow progress. In some cases, goal conflict may cause collaborative inertia, where decision-making is

Figure 3: Collaborative Advantage



Source: Kovach, K.A. Pursuing collaborative advantage to solve wicked problems in public health. JPHMP Direct. Published Aug. 17, 2023. Accessed Oct. 17, 2024. <https://jphmpdirect.com/pursuing-collaborative-advantage-to-solve-wicked-problems-in-public-health/>

delayed, or projects stall due to disagreements that are harder to resolve than when working independently.

- **Resource Demands:** Partnerships often require additional resources, such as staff time, meeting space and logistical support, that would not be necessary for solo projects. The coordination of interorganizational meetings, joint planning sessions and ongoing communication can add significant strain to an organization's budget and personnel capacity.
- **Accountability Challenges:** In a collaborative setting, the lines of accountability can blur, making it difficult to determine which organization is responsible for specific goals or tasks. This lack of clarity can lead to situations where some partners benefit from the collaboration without contributing adequately, which may breed resentment and reduce the partnership's overall effectiveness.
- **Impact on Core Services:** Partnerships can sometimes divert attention and resources away from an organization's core services. By dedicating time and energy to joint projects, an organization may unintentionally neglect its

primary responsibilities, leading to diminished service quality or efficiency in other areas.

- **Adopting Partner Challenges:** Collaborating closely with external organizations can also mean inheriting their problems. For instance, a partner's internal issues — such as inefficiencies, staffing shortages or reputational challenges — can spill over into the partnership, affecting overall performance and progress.
- **Collaborative Capacity Building:** Effective collaboration requires specific skills, systems and processes, which organizations may not already possess. Building the capacity to partner effectively — through training, new governance structures or improved communication mechanisms — can take considerable time, effort and resources, particularly if the partners lack prior experience working together.

By weighing the real or potential benefits and costs of a partnership, public health leaders can make more strategic decisions about what partnerships their organization should pursue. This can help ensure resources are allocated to the most appropriate partnerships, as well as to help public health leaders maximize collaborative advantage.



### *Key Takeaways*

- Leaders should weigh the benefits of partnerships against their costs.
- Benefits include things like productivity, capacity, adaptability, legitimacy, efficiency and linkages.
- Costs include things like goal conflict, resource demands, accountability, impact on core services, adopting partner challenges and collaborative capacity building.
- Collaborative advantage refers to the transformative power of strategic partnerships, when the collective results are far greater than what any one organization could accomplish individually.
- By weighing the benefits and costs of partnerships, leaders can make more strategic decisions about the partnerships with a chance of creating collaborative advantage.



### *Interactive Tool*

The interactive tool on the next page will help you reflect on how partnerships are aligned with your organization's winning aspiration and will help you weigh the costs and benefits of the partnership. This will help you make strategic decisions about what partnerships you should pursue or end.





# Interactive Tool

## *Determining If Partnerships Are Strategic*

### **Purpose of the Tool**

Strategic partnerships can enhance your organization's impact by leveraging resources, building capacity and fostering innovation. Strategic partnerships are aligned with your organization's winning aspiration and the benefits of the partnership outweigh the costs. This worksheet helps evaluate potential collaborations, ensuring they align with your goals and provide more benefits than challenges.

### **Instructions**

- **Step 1** focuses on defining your winning aspiration and purpose of the partnership.
- **Step 2** focuses on identifying potential partners relevant to your winning aspiration and evaluating their strategic fit. Use the grid in Step 2 to evaluate how potential partners align with your winning aspiration and to compare their potential benefits and costs. This will help you determine which partnerships are worth pursuing.
- **Step 3** focuses on determining your next steps. This might include determining how to approach potential partners about a collaboration, setting up a memorandum of understanding or ending an ongoing partnership.

### **Step 1: Define the Reason for Your Partnerships**

Write in your organization's name: (Your organization could be the health department, division or other unit.)

Write out your organization's winning aspiration:

Write out how partnerships are intended to advance the winning aspiration:



# Interactive Tool

## Step 2: Partnerships Analysis Grid

Use the table below to evaluate each potential partner.

Partners	Benefits	Costs/Challenges	Cost/Benefit Analysis	Decision
List potential partners below.	How can this partner support our winning aspiration?	What challenges or obstacles might we experience?	What must happen for benefits to outweigh costs?	Will we pursue this partner? (Yes/No)

### Reference Guide – Types of Benefits and Costs

#### Potential Benefits

- **Productivity:** Collaboration can help an organization accomplish more than it could on its own, advancing its mission or goals.
- **Capacity:** Partnerships can help organizations acquire and organize needed resources.
- **Adaptability:** Working with partners can make organizations more flexible, helping them navigate uncertainty or new challenges.

#### Potential Costs

- **Goal Conflict:** Goals are unclear, misaligned or unspecific.
- **Resource Demands:** Additional resources are needed to manage a partnership.
- **Accountability Challenges:** There is a lack of clarity for who is responsible or an inability to hold partners accountable.



# Interactive Tool

## Reference Guide – Types of Benefits and Costs (*continued*)

### Potential Benefits

- **Legitimacy:** Collaboration also can boost an organization's reputation or prestige.
- **Efficiency:** While partnerships sometimes reduce efficiency, they can save time and money when efforts are delegated or deduplicated.
- **Linkages:** Partnerships can open doors to larger networks and create new connections.
- **Collaborative Advantage:** Especially positive outcomes enhance creativity, innovation and transformation in ways that would not be possible without partnerships.

### Potential Costs

- **Impact on Core Services:** Attention or resources are diverted from core services.
- **Partner Challenges:** Close collaboration also can mean taking on their challenges.
- **Collaborative Capacity Building:** Building the capacity to partner effectively – through training, new governance structures or improved communication mechanisms – can take considerable time, effort and resources.

## Step 3: Next Steps

Outline next steps to pursue or withdraw from partnerships, such as identifying contacts, assigning roles, leveraging relationships or gathering background information.



# Determining the Right Form of Collaboration

Collaboration occurs when organizations work together to achieve shared goals that would be difficult to accomplish independently.<sup>5</sup> As emphasized in the Public Health 3.0 concept, collaboration is vital for public health growth and success and requires health departments to engage partners across various sectors to impact health outcomes.<sup>18</sup> However, partnerships are not one-size-fits-all. Collaboration exists on a spectrum, and different structures support various types of partnerships. This section outlines key concepts related to forms of collaboration, including the continuum of collaboration and multi-organizational structures. By understanding these concepts, strategic public health leaders can better align the form of collaboration with their goals, enhancing their ability to manage partnerships and achieve collaborative advantage.

## Continuum of Collaboration

Collaboration spans a spectrum of strategies, often referred to as the continuum of collaboration (Figure 4, page 21). This continuum encompasses varying levels of partnership, from more distant, arm's-length relationships with minimal shared responsibilities, to closer, more deeply integrated collaborations characterized by strong relationships, joint efforts and significant shared achievements.<sup>19,20</sup> While no single type of collaboration is inherently superior, more advanced forms of collaboration offer greater potential for strategic benefits. As partnerships progress along this continuum — from basic coordination to full synergy — they draw upon more resources, expertise and commitment, creating opportunities for collective impact.

The continuum of collaboration represents growth across a partnership representing greater trust, risk taking, resource sharing and coordination. The levels across the continuum of collaboration include the following:

- 1. Immuring:** Organizations operate independently without any interaction or input from others. This level isn't typically considered collaboration since there's no exchange between organizations.
- 2. Networking:** At this stage, organizations exchange information for mutual benefit. While they communicate and share knowledge, their activities remain separate. An example of networking might be participating in a conference or webinar. Here information is shared, but there is no responsibility for reciprocating or taking action.
- 3. Coordinating:** Organizations not only share information but also adjust their activities to achieve a common goal. There's more interaction, with efforts becoming more aligned. An example of coordinating might include efforts from health departments, health care providers and pharmacies to ensure sufficient coverage for childhood vaccinations.
- 4. Cooperating:** Organizations start sharing resources — like staff, finances or space. This deeper level of collaboration involves direct support of each other's efforts. An example of cooperating might include an academic health department, where students, faculty and health department staff work together to enhance education, research and practice.
- 5. Collaborating:** At this stage, organizations learn from each other to enhance their collective capacity. They work closely together, build trust and develop shared solutions. An example of collaboration might include a community health improvement collaborative, where multiple organizations work together closely to secure and share funding, learn about the issues and develop synergy between partners.
- 6. Integrating:** This is the highest level of collaboration, where organizations fully merge their operations, administrative structures and budgets. While this may no longer resemble traditional collaboration, it represents the ultimate form of partnership where the entities function as one. An example of integrating in public health might include consolidated, multi-county health departments. Here, two or more agencies have come together to form a larger single entity with greater economies of scale.



Figure 4: Continuum of Collaboration



Source: Mashek, D. (2015). *Capacities and Institutional Support Needed Along the Collaboration Continuum*. A presentation to the Academic Deans Committee of the Claremont Colleges. <https://www.teaglefoundation.org/Teagle/media/GlobalMediaLibrary/documents/resources/CollaborationContinuum.pdf?ext=.pdf>

## Multi-Organizational Structures

Many public health partnerships are relatively informal, lacking defined processes for collaboration, decision-making and authority. While this informal approach can work well for simpler partnerships, as collaborations become more complex, having more formal structures in place can improve their effectiveness. Multi-organizational structures refer to formal systems used to coordinate collaborative work.<sup>21</sup> These structures can vary based on the needs and objectives of the partnership, and they differ in terms of how decisions are made, who is involved and how much control each organization has.

Here are a few types of multi-organizational structures, ranging from informal to highly formal:<sup>21</sup>

- **Network:** In a network, organizations share information for mutual benefit, but there's no coordinated action or shared goal. Each organization advances its own work while benefiting from the collective knowledge. For example, a network of public health researchers might share data on chronic disease prevention, helping each organization with its own research.
- **Tacit Agreement:** In a tacit agreement, organizations or groups work toward a shared goal with little joint work. There's no explicit agreement, and each organization retains full autonomy. For example, several health organizations might independently promote vaccinations to combat

an emerging disease. While there's no direct collaboration, their combined efforts contribute to the same outcome.

- **Coalition:** A coalition is a more formal structure where multiple organizations collaborate closely to achieve a shared goal. Members pool resources, align strategies and coordinate their activities, but they still maintain some level of autonomy. For instance, a coalition could involve local governments, hospitals and non-governmental organizations working together to tackle the opioid crisis, combining efforts in prevention, treatment and policy reform.
- **Consortium:** A consortium is a separate entity created to manage and align the activities of different organizations working toward a common goal. It ensures efficient use of resources and keeps the collaboration running smoothly. An example in public health might be a regional center to manage population-based public health tasks, such as community health assessment and improvement planning, surveillance and policy development, that coordinates with county health departments in the region.

Each of these structures varies in formality, the depth of collaboration and how much autonomy participants retain. Each has its strengths and is suited to different challenges in public health — from informal data-sharing networks to highly coordinated coalitions tackling complex health crises.

# The Region 7 Public Health Innovation Hub: Using a Multi-Organizational Structure to Enhance Collaboration

Kevin A. Kovach, Dr.P.H., M.Sc\* | \*Kansas Health Institute

The Region 7 Public Health Innovation Hub (Innovation Hub) showcases the value of a well-designed multi-organizational structure. While initially referred to as a collaborative network, the Hub aligns more closely with the characteristics of a coalition, as outlined in this resource. Led by the Kansas Health Institute, the Hub brings together organizations across four states to provide leadership, coordination and shared expertise. Together, the Innovation Hub supports information gathering, delivers technical assistance and develops resources aimed at strengthening public health systems.

## Enhancing Collaboration and Capacity

Through the coalition structure, the Innovation Hub established essential mechanisms for:

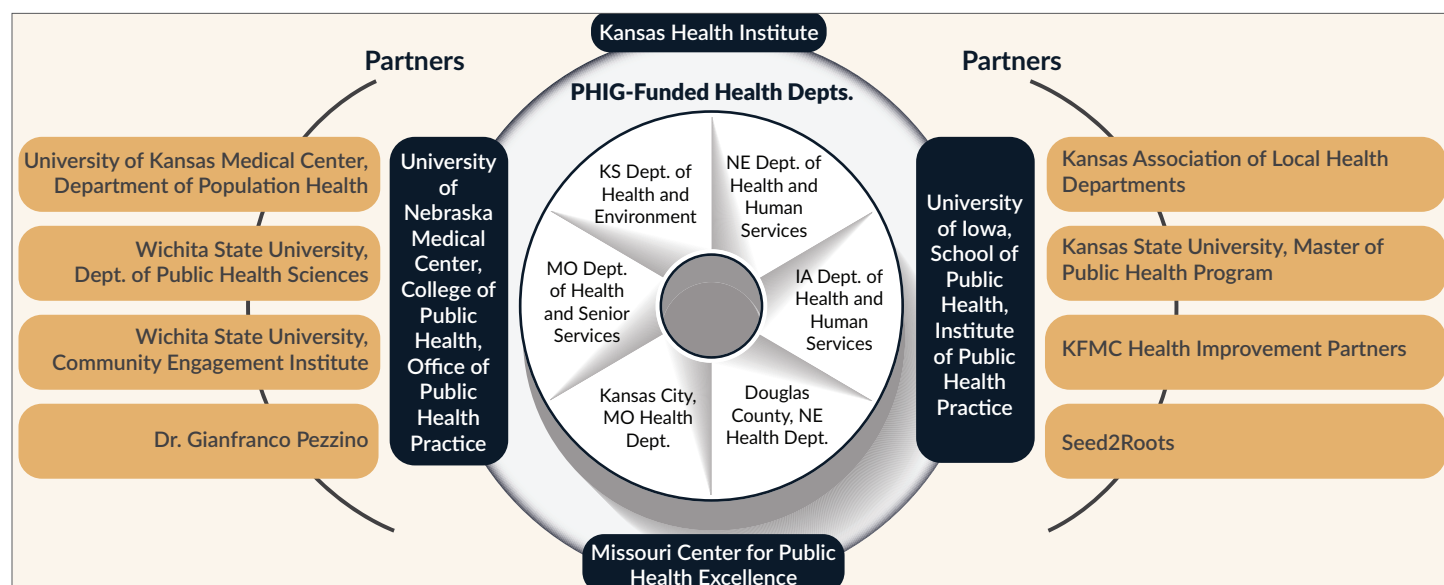
- **Information Sharing:** Keeping all partners informed and engaged.
- **Collaborative Workflows:** Aligning efforts to leverage collective strengths.
- **Resource Allocation:** Equitably distributing financial and human resources.
- **Governance Processes:** Creating transparency and accountability.

These efforts required significant upfront work but have greatly enhanced the quality of our initiatives and strengthened trust among partners. By aligning resources and establishing clear processes, the Innovation Hub has become a model of collaboration, enabling the Innovation Hub to build capacity, foster innovation and amplify impact across the region. The Hub's structure is illustrated in *Figure 5*.

## Early Challenges and Strategic Alignment

Early in the Hub's development, there were challenges in effectively communicating the vision to stakeholders and partners. Without a clear structure to guide collaboration, it was difficult to align expectations, establish trust and build momentum. Recognizing these barriers, a formal multi-organizational structure was adopted to clarify roles, processes and priorities. This approach allowed the Innovation Hub to communicate the vision more effectively, ensuring partners better understand their roles.

Figure 5: Region 7 Public Health Innovation Hub



## A Selection of Types of Public Health Partnership

- **Community Health Coalitions:** These temporary partnerships bring together diverse stakeholders — local governments, health care providers, community groups and nonprofits — to tackle specific health challenges. They focus on collaborative health promotion and disease prevention initiatives.
- **Health in All Policies (HiAP):** HiAP integrates health considerations into policymaking across sectors, such as transportation, housing and education. It's a collaborative approach aimed at improving population health and reducing disparities.
- **Shared Service Arrangements:** Also known as cross-jurisdictional sharing (CJS), this model allows multiple public health departments to share resources, improving efficiency and addressing regional health challenges more effectively.
- **Multi-County/Regional Health Departments:** Counties collaborate to form a single public health entity that serves multiple areas, pooling resources to deliver better services, especially in rural regions.
- **Academic Health Departments (AHDs):** Formal partnerships between academic institutions and public health departments enhance research, education and practice by leveraging academic expertise to meet community health needs.
- **Faith-Based Public Health Partnerships:** Faith-based organizations provide health education and services, especially to underserved communities. These partnerships are powerful in mobilizing community trust and delivering culturally sensitive interventions.
- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP):** These collaborations between government agencies and the private sector leverage innovation, funding and expertise to address public health challenges, like during vaccine rollouts or disease prevention campaigns.
- **Outsourcing Public Health Services:** Public health functions, such as clinical services or health promotion, are sometimes contracted out to private entities or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to improve efficiency and expand coverage.



### Key Takeaways

- Partnerships are not one-size-fits-all and different structures are useful for different types of partnerships.
- A continuum of collaboration exists from simple information sharing to joint operations and integrated functions. Higher levels of collaboration hold more promise but require more resources and trust.
- Multi-organizational structures, such as networks, tacit agreements, coalitions and consortiums can be used to organize a partnership in line with its goals.



### Interactive Tool

The interactive tool on the next page will help you reflect on the goals of your partnership and the type of multi-organizational structure that might be best aligned.



# Interactive Tool

## Choosing the Right Form for Your Partnership

### Purpose of the Tool

Strategic collaborations enhance your organization's impact by leveraging resources, building capacity and fostering innovation. Successful partnerships can be enhanced through the use of multi-organizational structures. The purpose of this worksheet is to help you identify different types of multi-organizational structures and think through how different aspects of each might support your specific partnership needs.

### Instructions

- **Step 1:** Describe your partnership needs.
- **Step 2:** Review multi-organizational structures.
- **Step 3:** Identify features of multi-organizational structures aligned with your goals.
- **Step 4:** Select multi-organizational structures that align with partnership needs.

### Step 1: Describe Your Partnership Needs

Circle the answers that best match your needs.

1. What do you want to accomplish through the partnership?  
Circle all that apply.

- Information sharing (1 point)
- Resource sharing (2 points)
- Coordination of activities (3 points)
- Innovation (4 points)
- Shared capacity building (5 points)

2. How closely do you envision your organization working with partners? Circle the best answer.

- Fully independent (1 point)
- Slightly aligned (2 points)
- Some joint efforts (3 points)
- Highly integrated (4 points)
- Fully unified (5 points)

3. How much do you agree with this statement: My organization will be committed to the partnership, even if decisions made do not always favor our organization? Circle the best answer.

- Strongly disagree (1 point)
- Disagree (2 points)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3 points)
- Agree (4 points)
- Strongly agree (5 points)

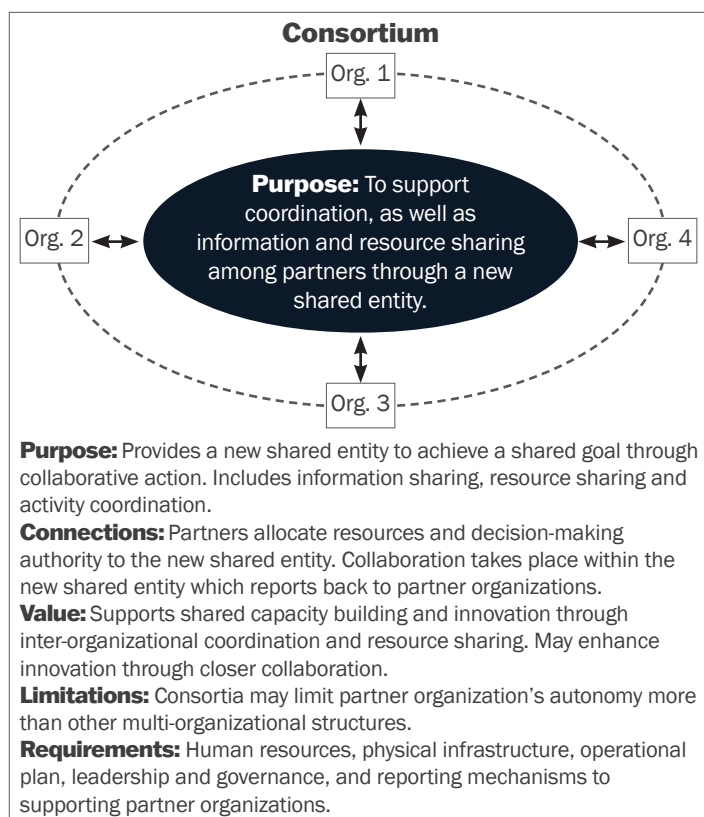
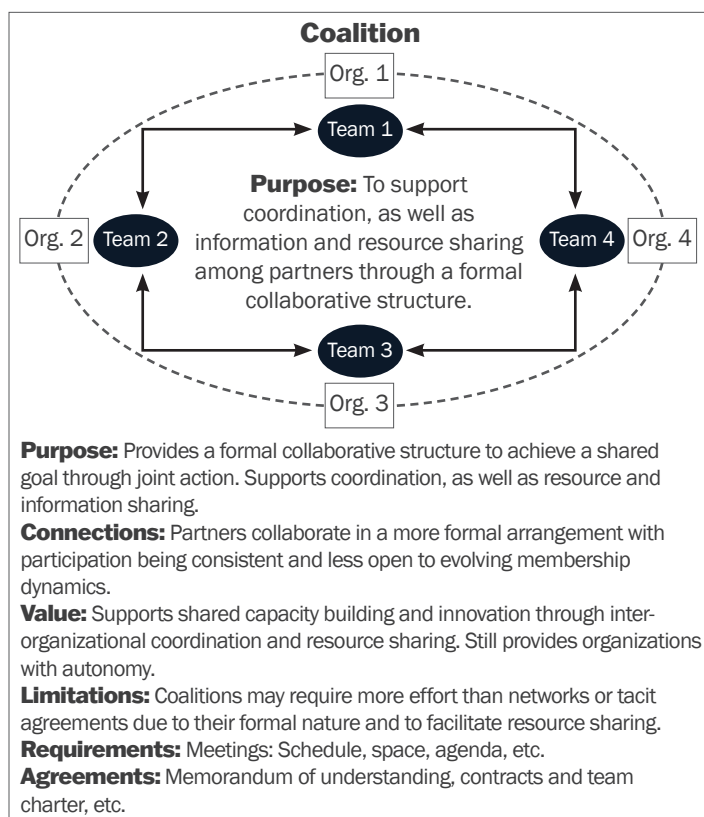
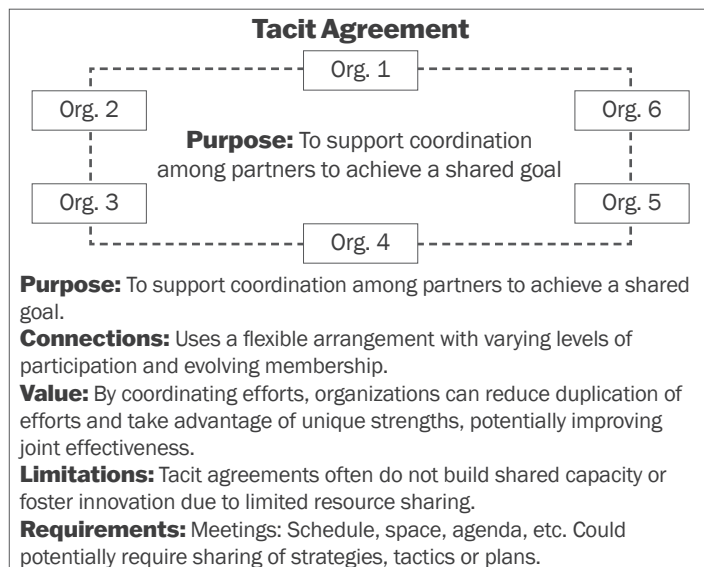
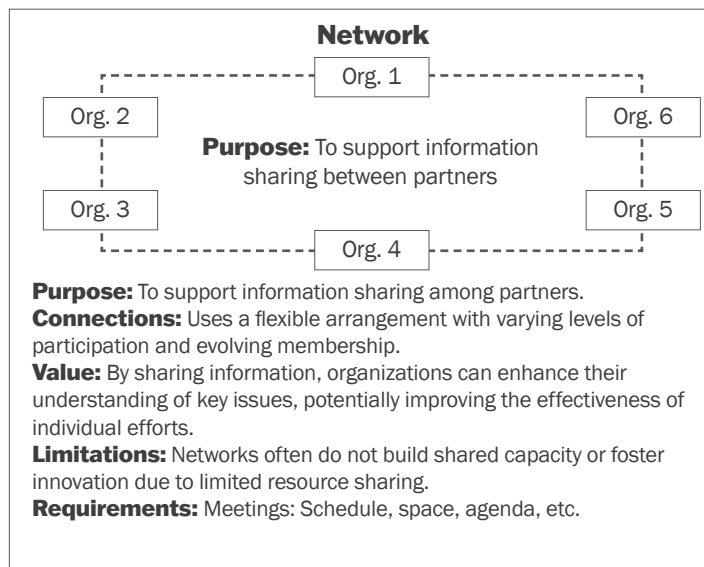
Add up the scores from your answers here. The larger the number, the more appropriate higher forms of multi-organizational structures may be.



# Interactive Tool

## Step 2: Review Multi-Organizational Structures

Review this infographic for information about different types of multi-organizational structures.



Source: Adapted from Irandoust, H., and Benaskeur, A.R. Multi-Organizational Structures. Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence. Published online 2008.



# Interactive Tool

## Step 3: Identify Features of Multi-Organization Structures Aligned With Your Goals

Select multi-organizational structures that you think best align with your partnership needs and list aspects of these structures you may incorporate.

**Describe aspects of multi-organizational structures you may incorporate.**





# Interactive Tool

## Step 4: Select Multi-Organizational Structures That Align With Partnership Needs

Select one statement in each row by circling or highlighting your choice. Once completed, review your selections to determine which multi-organizational structure best aligns with your needs and goals.

Feature	Network	Tacit Agreement	Coalition	Consortium
Purpose	Sharing information for mutual benefit.	Achieving a shared goal through independent action.	Achieving a shared goal through formal collaboration.	Achieving a shared goal through the development of a new shared entity.
Connections	Loose and informal; no formal agreements required.	Informal collaboration; organizations act independently but align goals.	Formal collaboration through fixed teams.	Formal collaboration through a new shared entity.
Control	Fully autonomous; no shared decision-making or governance.	Fully autonomous; coordination is implicit and informal.	Participants retain control but coordinate closely for specific objectives.	Participating organizations share control through formal agreements.
Governance	None; organizations operate independently.	None; governed by mutual understanding of shared goals.	Temporary, informal governance; may involve ad hoc leadership structures.	Governed by a formal contractual framework or shared governance structure.
Membership	Open and reversible; variable participation levels.	Defined group, but informal and independent participation.	Temporary membership for the duration of the project.	Open (conditional) membership governed by formal agreements.
Commitment Level	Low; minimal obligations among participants.	Low to medium; implicit commitment to the shared goal.	Medium; participants commit for the duration of the project.	Medium to high; sustained commitment for formalized collaboration.
Resource Sharing	Rare; primarily information sharing.	Rare; organizations contribute resources independently.	Limited; resources are pooled temporarily for a project or goal.	Shared resources (funding, personnel, or infrastructure) are essential.
Value	Builds understanding and connections.	Aligns independent actions for cumulative impact.	Pools resources temporarily for impactful outcomes.	Pools expertise, funding and infrastructure for large-scale initiatives.
Limitations	Limited capacity for innovation or resource-sharing.	Lack of coordination may lead to inefficiencies or conflicts.	Temporary focus may limit long-term benefits; potential for competing interests.	Requires significant resource investment and adherence to formal agreements.



# Making Partnerships Work

To this point, you've learned how to assess whether a partnership is a strategic fit for your organization and how to structure collaborations to align with your goals. While these are essential parts of partnership development, it's effective management that often determines a partnership's success. When managed well, most partnerships have the potential to thrive. This section covers key factors for successfully managing your partnerships.

## Factors Supporting Successful Partnerships

Several key factors play a role in whether a partnership will succeed:<sup>22</sup>

- Understanding past partnerships and successes
- Shared commitments, roles and responsibilities
- Synergy
- Strong interpersonal relationships
- Effective and continuous communication
- Sustainability of partnerships

## Understanding Past Partnerships and Successes

Rather than viewing partnership development as an art, it's helpful to focus on specific elements that have been linked to successful collaborations. One crucial factor is taking time to acknowledge previous partnerships and past successes. The **Health Impact Partners Resources for Power Sharing and Collaboration Guide** recommends addressing this openly with potential partners through conversation.

A group discussion can be a great way to start, focusing on questions like:

- What is the history of partnerships between the organizations involved?

- Has it been positive? If so, what contributed to that success?
- If it's been negative or challenging, what could have made it better?
- How do these past experiences shape the partnership you're currently developing?

Reflecting on these questions together allows you to build on past successes and address any challenges up front, setting the stage for a stronger, more effective partnership.

### *Developing Shared Commitments, Roles and Responsibilities*

Setting up clear commitments, roles and responsibilities is essential for partnership success. When everyone knows how they'll contribute, the partnership can run smoothly and stay on track<sup>14</sup>. These shared commitments provide structure and accountability, guiding how partners work together. While formal agreements like a Memorandum of Understanding can outline roles, sometimes informal ground rules for engagement are just as effective.

Building these shared commitments also connects to another critical factor: a shared vision and goals. Seldon, Jolin and Schmitz identified shared vision and goals as essential for "needle-moving collaboratives."<sup>23</sup> When partners define a clear vision and set goals together, they create a map for the work ahead. This shared sense of purpose keeps the partnership focused and prevents it from straying into areas that aren't mutually beneficial or relevant to the main objectives.

### *Developing Synergy*

Partnership synergy refers to the collective advantage that emerges when individuals and organizations combine their unique perspectives, resources and skills.<sup>24</sup> This is why partnerships often outperform individual organizations.<sup>25</sup> Synergy isn't just about pooling resources — it's about creating something

innovative that's greater than the sum of its parts. It includes tangible assets such as funding, expertise and influence, but also focuses on the relationships, leadership and shared commitment that drive success. When partnerships foster an environment of creative, holistic and practical thinking, synergy can reach its full potential.

To plan, measure and manage synergy, two tools are particularly useful, the Give-Get Grid and the Jones Synergy Scale.

The **Give-Get Grid** (Figure 6) helps you and potential partners outline what each party expects to contribute (the “gives”) and what they hope to receive (the “gets”).<sup>19,20</sup> This ensures a balanced exchange, creating a partnership that’s mutually beneficial. By using the Give-Get Grid, both parties can set clear goals and roles, laying a solid foundation for a successful, sustainable partnership.

The Give-Get Grid allows partners to clarify both what they hope to gain from the partnership (the “gets”) and what they are willing to contribute (the “gives”).<sup>26,27</sup> This helps identify tangible resources and needs, enabling partners to leverage complementary strengths. This can help partners plan for leveraging strengths to build capacity and new capabilities. This can also support sustainability. Originally designed for

group planning, the Give-Get Grid can also be used more informally to help your organization reflect on what it needs from a partnership and what it can offer in return. Extending these conversations to partnering organizations ensures that all parties are aligned and contributing in a balanced way.

While the Give-Get Grid focuses on tangible aspects of partnership, the **Jones Synergy Scale** dives into the less visible but equally important dynamics that make a partnership thrive.<sup>28,29</sup> It measures factors like mutual benefit, personal satisfaction, progress toward goals, reciprocity and the energy generated by collaboration. By assessing these intangible elements, the Jones Synergy Scale provides a more holistic view of how the partnership is functioning — both operationally and relationally. It helps leaders ensure that the collaboration remains balanced, energizing and motivated by shared enthusiasm and progress.

Using both tools together gives a well-rounded approach to partnership synergy. The Give-Get Grid helps pinpoint complementary resources and contributions, while the Jones Synergy Scale (Figure 7, page 30) evaluates the intangible aspects that drive the relationship. Together, they enable more strategic planning, smarter resource allocation and a deeper understanding of what makes the partnership successful.

Figure 6: An Example of the Give-Get Grid for Public Health Partnerships

What We Have to Give (Contributions)		What We Hope to Get (Benefits)
Local Health Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Credible source of data and related analysis</li><li>Policy analysis and research</li><li>Staff time</li><li>Grant resources</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Policy advocacy</li><li>Relationships to community members and elected officials</li></ul>
State-Level Advocacy Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Credible reputation of effective advocacy</li><li>Network of elected officials</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Resources to support staff time</li><li>Access to credible data</li></ul>

Source: Adapted from Behringer, B., Southerland, J.L., Plummer, R.M. Case Studies of Community–Academic Partnerships Established Using the Give-Get Grid Model. *Health Promotion Practice*. 2018;19(5):654-663. doi:10.1177/1524839917740118.

## Strong Interpersonal Relationships

A key factor for successful partnerships is the presence of strong, positive interpersonal relationships. At the heart of any partnership are the people who support it on behalf of their organizations. As Adam Levine from Johns Hopkins University observed, “Strangers tend to remain strangers if left to their own devices,” emphasizing the importance of investing time in relationship-building to lay a solid foundation for collaboration.<sup>30</sup>

The Human Impact Partners *Resource for Power Sharing and Collaboration* report suggests activities that help establish and strengthen these relationships.<sup>22</sup> Examples include setting aside dedicated time for informal meetups like coffee chats, attending each other’s events to show

support, and organizing casual get-togethers, like brown-bag lunches over topics of shared interest. These efforts help team members get to know each other’s priorities and personalities, building trust and understanding that will support the partnership over time.

It’s also important to foster relationships throughout both partnering organizations to ensure the partnership’s sustainability. If connections only exist between a few individuals, the partnership may struggle to endure if staff turnover occurs. By cultivating layers of relationships, you can strengthen the partnership’s resilience and increase its chances of long-term success.

## Effective and Continuous Communication

Effective, ongoing communication is another key factor for successful partnerships. Human Impact Partners emphasizes the importance of maintaining a constant flow of information, as it builds credibility and trust.<sup>22</sup> Strong communication not only enhances team functioning but also leads to better decision-making and coordination, helping partnerships operate more smoothly and effectively.

Public health leaders can support effective and continuous communication across partnerships by providing clear, reassuring and accurate information. As partners, using effective communication strategies and sharing resources are important to build trust. In addition, allowing time and space for meaningful engagement, producing working documents or reports together, supporting shared work publicly, and giving credit for accomplishments all promote sustainability.<sup>22</sup>

## Sustainability of Partnerships

Long-term partnerships are more likely to accomplish their goals and make a meaningful impact on public health. To build partnerships that last, it’s essential to focus on sustained engagement and support. Here are some key elements for fostering sustainable partnerships:

- **Commitment to the Long Game:** Successful, long-lasting partnerships require patience and support from top leadership. When leaders show encouragement and demonstrate commitment, it reinforces support for staff

**Figure 7: Jones Synergy Scale**

1. Feelings of energy, excitement and passion.
2. Extra outcomes are achieved as a result of the partnership.
3. Work as a partnership to effectively problem-solve and overcome difficulties.
4. The partnership is making ongoing progress toward its goals.
5. All partners are benefiting from the activities of the partnership.
6. The skills and unique perspectives of the partners complement each other.
7. The work of the partnership is broken down and shared by all partners.
8. Experience personal satisfaction and fulfillment from the activities of the partnership.

Note: Likert Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree, and Don't Know  
Source: Jones, J., & Barry, M. M. (2011). *Developing a scale to measure synergy in health promotion partnerships*. *Global Health Promotion*, 18(2), 36–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757975911404762>.

engaged in partnership work. Embedding partnership development into job descriptions, setting aside time for partnership activities, and formalizing relationships through memorandums of understanding (MOUs), internal policies or other agreements are all ways to strengthen and sustain partnerships over time.

- **Achieving Short-Term Successes:** While partnerships are typically built with long-term goals in mind, showing short-term successes can build trust and momentum.<sup>31</sup> Early “wins” help establish a track record of success and demonstrate the value of the partnership. Identifying and celebrating these initial accomplishments can set the foundation for a strong, lasting relationship.
- **Integrating Ongoing Evaluation:** Regular evaluation helps partnerships monitor progress, raise awareness of accomplishments, and stay aligned with shared goals. The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) notes that ongoing evaluation also refines the partnership’s shared vision of success.<sup>32</sup> A practical approach is to use a logic model or theory of change, as you would for any public health initiative. For partnerships, a logic model could include:
  - **Partnership Inputs:** Resources each partner brings
  - **Partnership Activities:** Collaborative actions
  - **Partnership Outputs:** Immediate products or deliverables
  - **Partnership Outcomes:** Effects on the partnership itself
  - **Initiative Short- and Long-Term Outcomes:** Overall goals impacted by the partnership

The CDC suggests using broad evaluation questions, such as those shown in *Figure 8*.

By committing to a long-term approach, celebrating early wins and incorporating continuous evaluation, partnerships can stay strong and impactful over time.

Several tools are available to measure the strength of partnerships. One of these is the Partnership Self-Assessment Tool, designed to examine key dimensions of a partnership.<sup>33</sup> This tool invites partners to rate their collaboration across areas such as synergy, leadership and resources, as well as benefits and challenges. Using this tool (or others like it) enables partnerships to systematically assess what’s working well and identify any challenges. The insights gained can also guide quality improvement efforts.

Evaluating partnerships can help support their success and sustainability. Being able to document accomplishments and progress on long-term goals strengthens each partner’s commitment. Evaluation data also supports communication with funders and other stakeholders, providing evidence that may help secure resources for sustaining the partnership.

**Figure 8: Partnership Evaluation Questions and Example Measures**

Key Evaluation Questions for Partnerships	Example Measures
Who is involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of members</li> <li>• Retention of members</li> <li>• Level of involvement</li> </ul>
How do partners interact?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner satisfaction survey</li> <li>• Partnership structure</li> <li>• Assessments on key partnership dimensions — e.g., trust, communication, shared vision</li> </ul>
What do partners do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number and type of activities completed through the partnership</li> </ul>
What are the results of the partnership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger relationships</li> <li>• Policy, system and environmental change</li> <li>• Implementation of programs</li> <li>• Behavior or knowledge change</li> </ul>

Source: National Association of County and City Health Officials. *Partnership Evaluation Guide: Building Productive Relationships Through Evaluation*. 2021. <http://www.cdc.gov/eval/framework/index.htm>.



## Aligning Values and Activities for Impact: The Academic Health Department Partnership Between Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health and the University of Kansas Medical Center

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The longstanding partnership between Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health (LDCPH) and the University of Kansas Medical Center (KUMC) illustrates the benefits of engaging in a strategic public health partnership called an Academic Health Department. Modeled after the concept within medical education of teaching hospitals, academic health departments are “arrangements between an academic institution and a governmental public health agency which provide mutual benefits in teaching, research and service, with academia informing the practice of public health and the governmental public health agency informing the academic program.”<sup>34</sup> This case describes the efforts undertaken to build and maintain a strong partnership with significant impact.

### Partnership Development: Accumulating Small Wins to Build Trust

In 2011, LDCPH and staff at the University of Kansas (KU) embarked on a contractual agreement to complete a community health assessment (CHA) and community health improvement plan (CHIP) over two years. At the end of the two years, LDCPH and KU staff recognized they had developed a trusting relationship built on the cumulative series of accomplishments during the contract. Further, having developed a greater understanding of the strengths and opportunities offered by public health practice and academic settings, both organizations sought to expand and deepen the partnership to move beyond transactional activities to work toward transformational change. In 2013, LDCPH and KU signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for a one-year period, with a plan to experiment with a few activities and decide at the end of the year if the partnership yielded mutual benefits. The MOU outlined shared values and some shared resources, including staff time and office space. At the conclusion of the year, shareholders from both partners convened to review the first year’s accomplishments, including establishing a way for LDCPH staff to take KU classes through cost-sharing, an intensive project to develop strategic communications, and

support for evaluating CHIP implementation. Consistent with the Trust Building Loop (page 11) described previously in this toolkit, the shareholders concluded that additional small accomplishments yielded greater trust and a desire to move toward more significant goals. The partnership moved forward under a new three-year MOU.

### Growth and Maintenance of the Partnership

The partnership between LDCPH and KU (now KUMC) has been operating continuously since 2013. This partnership has weathered significant challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and leadership changes. During that time, the partners undertook some actions that strengthened the partnership. Early on, the partners used strategic planning to develop three overarching goals: 1) to advance policy, system and environmental change that benefits the health of people in Douglas County, 2) to contribute to the evidence base of what is working in public health, and 3) to foster capacity building and learning among the current and future public health workforce. These three goals served as the guideposts for decision-making about the kinds of work undertaken through the partnership and served as a starting place for the development of annual work plans that support ongoing growth and implementation.

Further, partners have intentionally communicated about the partnership’s benefits to influential stakeholders for their work. For example, the county commission knows about the unique partnership and is aware that some of the work products from the health department are possible because of the partnership. Similarly, university stakeholders, such as department chairs, are also aware of the benefits of the close connection to the practice community. Both partners are intentional about building support for the partnership through their institutions. To date, the partnership has yielded expanded capacity for both organizations in multiple ways and a robust list of accompanying accomplishments (*Figure 9*, page



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## PARTNERSHIP STORY

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*continued*

33). University staff have contributed significantly to public health practice by leveraging their strengths for grant writing, research, evaluation and other essential capabilities, while the governmental practice setting has offered critical applied teaching and learning opportunities

for students, staff and university faculty. A commitment to improving both partner organizations while serving the public health needs of Douglas County, Kansas, led to a unique and transformational partnership that has not only sustained over a decade but has grown and evolved.

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**Figure 9: Accomplishments of the Academic Health Department at Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health and the University of Kansas Medical Center**



### Research

- Receipt of the \$1.4 million Partnership to Improve Community Health Grant from Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Evaluation of Safe Routes to School grant (Collie-Akers, LSI)
- Implementation of community health plan (Collie-Akers, LSI)
- Tobacco policy (Chen, Journalism)
- Farm to Institution (Harvey, HSES)
- Performance management of clinic operations (DiGennaro Reed, Applied Behavioral Science)
- STI screening project (Harsin, Applied Behavioral Science)
- HPV immunization project (Collie-Akers, KUMC)
- Innovation in Public Health Practice Initiative (Collie-Akers, KUMC)
- Co-presentation at five national and regional conferences
- One publication
- Selection as a National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) MAPP 2.0 pilot community
- Completion of Legal-Epi Living Wage Policy project
- Book chapter, Academic Health Department Partnerships



### Teaching/Training

- Completion of ABSC 710 Building Healthy Communities by two LDCPH staff
- Training of Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health (LDCPH) staff regarding community engagement
- Development and delivery of an eight-session Chief Health Strategist Training for all LDCPH staff
- Co-teaching of HSES 365 Peer Health Education by University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development (KUCCHD) and LDCHD staff
- Placement of six KUMC MPH students
- Placement of 10 ABS students
- Placement of eight HSES students
- Sixteen student volunteer internships
- J640 Strategic Campaigns client for 34 journalism school students
- Journal club to share and discuss emerging research
- Participation in Legal Epidemiology Training Cohort
- Story from the Field for NACCHO MAPP 2.0



### Service

- Contributed to successful accreditation of LDCPH
- Leadership for Community Health Assessment, Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)
- Shared use of evaluation technology
- Support with grant-writing
- Dissemination of lessons learned through Community Tool Box, the National Academy of Medicine, NACCHO and the Public Health Foundation
- Supporting implementation of the CHIP
- Behavioral health white paper completion
- Development of a Health Equity Impact Assessment process
- Completion of Living Wage Policy Assessment project
- Staff support to CHIP planning groups
- Established and supported Health Equity Advisory Board
- Held two annual summits on public health in Kansas



# Interactive Tool

## *Using the Give-Get Grid to Plan for Synergy*

### Purpose of the Tool

The Give-Get Grid is a strategic tool to clarify expectations, identify resources and align contributions and benefits among stakeholders in public health partnerships. By using this worksheet, stakeholders can ensure partnerships are equitable, effective and aligned with shared goals. This worksheet is designed to be used collaboratively with all partners present to facilitate open dialogue and shared understanding.

### Instructions

- **Step 1: Identify representatives** from each group or organization involved in the partnership. Representatives should include individuals with in-depth knowledge of their organization and some decision-making authority.
- **Step 2:** Prepare for the discussion by taking time to **understand each partner's interests**. This may include individual or group interviews/conversations with partners.
- **Step 3:** Convene a **facilitated session** with representatives from all partners and use the Give-Get Grid to clarify the benefits (gets) and contributions (gives) that partners need to keep them engaged in the partnership.
- **Step 4:** Produce a **final report** for the partnership detailing the benefits (gets) and contributions (gives) available to the partnership to develop expectations for how to advance the partnership successfully.
- **Step 5: Reconvene regularly** to ensure that partners are meeting their expectations and that they remain engaged in the partnership.

### Step 1: Identify Partner Organizations and Representatives

**Purpose:** The purpose of this step is to identify all partner organizations involved in the partnership and the representatives who will participate. These representatives should have in-depth knowledge of their organization and some decision-making authority to ensure meaningful engagement in the partnership. Think outside the box for non-traditional partners across sectors.

#### Instructions

1. Use the table on page 35 to list each partner organization participating in the partnership.
2. For each organization, include the name of the representative, their role or title and their contact information.
3. Ensure that representatives have the necessary knowledge and authority to contribute effectively.
4. Add space or recreate the table on a different document if necessary.

#### Key Considerations:

- Ensure all relevant organizations are included.
- Double-check contact details for accuracy.



# Interactive Tool

Partner Organizations and Representatives			
Partner Organization	Representative Name	Role/Title	Contact Information

## Step 2: Prepare for the Facilitated Discussion

**Purpose:** The purpose of this step is to prepare for a future facilitated discussion by taking time to understand each partner's interests. This preparation ensures a deeper understanding of each partner's goals, needs and contributions, which will form the foundation for productive collaboration. Preparation may include a guided conversation with partners.

### Instructions

1. Reach out to potential partners to schedule a one-on-one meeting or conversation.
2. Use the guide template on page 36 to plan and conduct conversations with partners.

3. Collect responses about potential partnership goals, necessary benefits, resources/strengths and ideas for collaboration.
4. Summarize the insights to inform the facilitated discussion.

### Key Considerations:

- Keep the discussion open-ended to encourage honest and comprehensive responses.
- Adapt the questions as necessary based on the specific context of the partnership.
- Use follow-up questions to explore responses in more depth and clarify details.



# Interactive Tool

## Semi-Structured Interview Guide Template

Question	Notes/Responses
1. We are pursuing a partnership focused on _____. Would you be interested in working collaboratively on this project? If yes, what goals might your organization want to accomplish through this partnership?	
2. What would your organization need to get out of this partnership to make it worthwhile and to keep you engaged?	
3. What resources or strengths might your organization be able to contribute to the partnership?	
4. How might your resources or strengths combine with those of other partners to create something greater than what any single organization could achieve?	
5. Is there anything else you might want to tell us about your organization's potential participation in this partnership?	
6. Other:	

## Next Steps

Compile and analyze the responses to identify common themes and unique insights. How might the common themes and unique insights guide your next steps? What will be important to consider when convening a facilitated discussion?



# Interactive Tool

## Step 3: Convene a Facilitated Discussion

**Purpose:** The purpose of this step is to convene a facilitated discussion with all partners to collaboratively identify contributions (gives) and benefits (gets). This discussion builds on the insights gathered in Step 2 but also provides space for additional exploration and innovation. The goal is to foster creative thinking and uncover opportunities for collaborative advantage, where partners achieve more together than they could individually.

### Instructions

1. Organize a meeting with representatives from all partner organizations.
2. Present the findings from Step 2 as a starting point for discussion.
3. Facilitate a conversation that:
  - Clarifies each partner's contributions (gives) and benefits (gets).

- Explores innovative ways for partners to combine resources and strengths.
  - Encourages open dialogue and creative thinking to identify collaborative advantages.
4. Use the table below to document contributions and benefits.

### Key Considerations:

- Ensure that all voices are heard and that the discussion remains inclusive.
- Encourage partners to think beyond traditional contributions and consider creative approaches to combining resources.
- Highlight opportunities where partners' contributions can align to create a greater collective impact.
- Recreate the table in a large enough format so that all partners can view it.

### Gives and Gets Table

Partners	Contributions (Gives)	Benefits (Gets)
Partner #1	What do we have to give to the partnership?	What do we need from the partnership?
Partner #2	What do we have to give to the partnership?	What do we need from the partnership?



# Interactive Tool

Partners	Contributions (Gives)	Benefits (Gets)
Partner #3	What do we have to give to the partnership?	What do we need from the partnership?
Partner #4	What do we have to give to the partnership?	What do we need from the partnership?
Etc.	What do we have to give to the partnership?	What do we need from the partnership?

## Next Steps

Summarize the results of the discussion in the Gives and Gets Table and share the completed table with all partners for review and feedback. Use the table to guide the development of a partnership agreement or action plan.

## Step 4: Develop a Team Charter

**Purpose:** The purpose of this step is to consolidate the insights and agreements from Steps 2 and 3 into a team charter. A team charter outlines the partnership's shared goals, roles, contributions, benefits and collaborative strategies. It provides a clear framework for accountability and alignment, ensuring all partners remain committed and engaged.

### Instructions

1. Use the template below to draft the team charter collaboratively.
2. Review the draft with all partners to ensure accuracy and consensus.

3. Finalize the charter and distribute it to all partners as a reference document.

*Please note that not all partnerships commit to a team charter from the start. Because of this, please feel free to use the parts of this tool that feel most appropriate.*

### Notes for Facilitators

- Encourage open dialogue during the drafting process to ensure inclusivity and transparency.
- Use the charter as a tool for onboarding new partners and maintaining alignment throughout the partnership lifecycle.





# Interactive Tool

## Team Charter Template

**Partnership Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mission and Goals:** *Clearly state the mission and overarching goals of the partnership:*

\_\_\_\_\_

**Roles and Responsibilities:** *Define the roles and responsibilities of each partner, organization and representative.*

Partner Organization	Representative Name	Role/Responsibilities
Our Organization		
Partner No. 1		
Partner No. 2		
Etc.		

**Contributions (Gives) and Benefits (Gets):** *Document the agreed contributions and expected benefits for each partner.*

Partner Organization	Contributions (Gives)	Benefits (Gets)
Our Organization		
Partner No. 1		
Partner No. 2		
Etc.		

**Opportunities for Collaborative Advantage:** Highlight ways the partnership can achieve outcomes greater than individual efforts:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Ground Rules:** Outline rules that the individuals involved in the partnership agree to related to behavior, norms, confidentiality, etc.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Key Agreements:** Outline agreements made during the discussion (e.g., decision-making, resource sharing):

\_\_\_\_\_

**Next Steps:** List actionable steps to launch or advance the partnership:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Review and Updates:

- Schedule regular reviews of the charter to address emerging needs.
- Indicate the frequency of reviews (e.g., quarterly, biannually): \_\_\_\_\_



# Interactive Tool

## Measuring Partnership Synergy

### Purpose of the Tool

The purpose of this worksheet is to gather input from all partners regarding the synergy of the partnership. By collecting feedback, we aim to evaluate the partnership's effectiveness, identify areas of strength, and uncover opportunities for improvement. The Jones Synergy Scale helps partners reflect on how well they are working together and achieving collaborative outcomes.

### Instructions

#### 1. Distribute the Survey:

- Share the worksheet with all partners involved in the partnership.
- Ensure each partner completes the scale individually and submits their responses confidentially.

#### 2. Provide Context:

- Explain the purpose of the survey to all participants, emphasizing its role in evaluating and improving the partnership.
- Encourage honest and thoughtful responses.

#### 3. Review Statements:

- Ask partners to carefully read each statement in the scale.
- Select the response that best represents their experience using the provided scale.

#### 4. Answer Open-Ended Questions:

- Respond to the open-ended questions thoughtfully, providing detailed insights about the partnership's strengths and areas for improvement.

#### 5. Collect Responses:

- Gather completed surveys from all partners.
- Ensure that responses remain confidential to promote openness.

#### 6. Analyze Results:

- Follow the guidelines in the "Instructions for Analyzing the Data" section to aggregate and interpret the findings.

#### 7. Facilitate Discussion:

- Share the results with partners and use the findings to guide collaborative discussions about the partnership's progress and areas for improvement.

## Jones Synergy Scale Survey

**Purpose:** The purpose of this survey is to gather input from all partners regarding the synergy of the partnership. Your feedback will help evaluate the partnership's effectiveness, identify strengths and uncover opportunities for improvement. Honest and thoughtful responses will ensure an accurate and actionable assessment.

### Instructions for Respondents

1. Reflect on your experience with the partnership as you answer each question.
2. For each statement, select the option that best represents your perspective.
3. Provide responses to the open-ended questions to better explain your views.
4. Submit your completed survey confidentially to ensure candid feedback.

**Name of the organization you represent:**



# Interactive Tool

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>I Don't Know</b>
1. All partners are benefiting from the activities of the partnership.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. The skills and unique perspectives of the partners complement each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I experience personal satisfaction and fulfillment from the activities of the partnership.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I feel the partnership is making ongoing progress toward its goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. The partnership works to effectively problem-solve and overcome difficulties.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. The work of the partnership is broken down and shared by all partners.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Extra outcomes are achieved as a result of working in partnership.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I have feelings of energy, excitement and passion working in this partnership.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



# Interactive Tool

## Open-Ended Questions

1. What do you see as the greatest strength of this partnership?
2. What challenges do you feel the partnership needs to address to improve its effectiveness?
3. How do you think the partnership could better leverage the unique skills and perspectives of its members?
4. What additional outcomes do you believe could be achieved through stronger collaboration?

*Thank you for your input! Your feedback is vital to ensuring the success and growth of this partnership. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact [Insert Contact Name/Email Here].*

## Instructions for Analyzing the Data

### 1. Aggregate Quantitative Data:

- Compile the numerical responses for each statement.
- Calculate the average score for each statement to identify overall trends.
- Identify statements with high levels of agreement (e.g., Strongly Agree, Agree) and those with low levels of agreement (e.g., Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

### 2. Analyze Open-Ended Responses:

- Review qualitative feedback to identify recurring themes, unique insights and specific examples of strengths or challenges.
- Group similar responses to understand common perspectives and priorities.

### 3. Compare Findings:

- Contextualize quantitative data with data from the open-ended responses.
- Highlight any discrepancies or alignments between the scores and written feedback.

### 4. Summarize Strengths and Challenges:

- List areas where the partnership is performing well, supported by high scores and positive comments.
- Identify challenges or areas for improvement based on lower scores and critical feedback.

### 5. Develop Recommendations:

- Use the findings to create actionable recommendations for improvement.
- Focus on leveraging strengths and addressing key challenges.

### 6. Share Results With Partners:

- Present the findings in a clear and concise format.
- Facilitate a discussion with all partners to review the results and collaboratively decide on next steps.

## Key Considerations

- Ensure confidentiality and anonymity when presenting aggregated data.
- Use the analysis to foster constructive dialogue and shared accountability.
- Reassess the partnership periodically to monitor progress and make ongoing improvements.

# Closing: Achieving Collaborative Advantage

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Addressing today's public health challenges requires more than isolated efforts — it takes strategic partnerships that leverage each organization's unique strengths toward a shared goal. By focusing on collaborative advantage, public health leaders can achieve outcomes that go beyond what any single organization could accomplish alone. The tools and strategies in this resource are designed to help you navigate the complexities of building and sustaining these partnerships, making sure they are strategic, effective and lasting.

Success lies in fostering trust, aligning your goals, and tapping into each partner's strengths. Together, we can tackle today's health issues, reduce inequities and create lasting improvements in population health. The journey toward collaborative advantage may have challenges, but the potential impact is worth every step. Let's commit to partnerships that make a real difference.

# Appendix:

## Endnotes

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